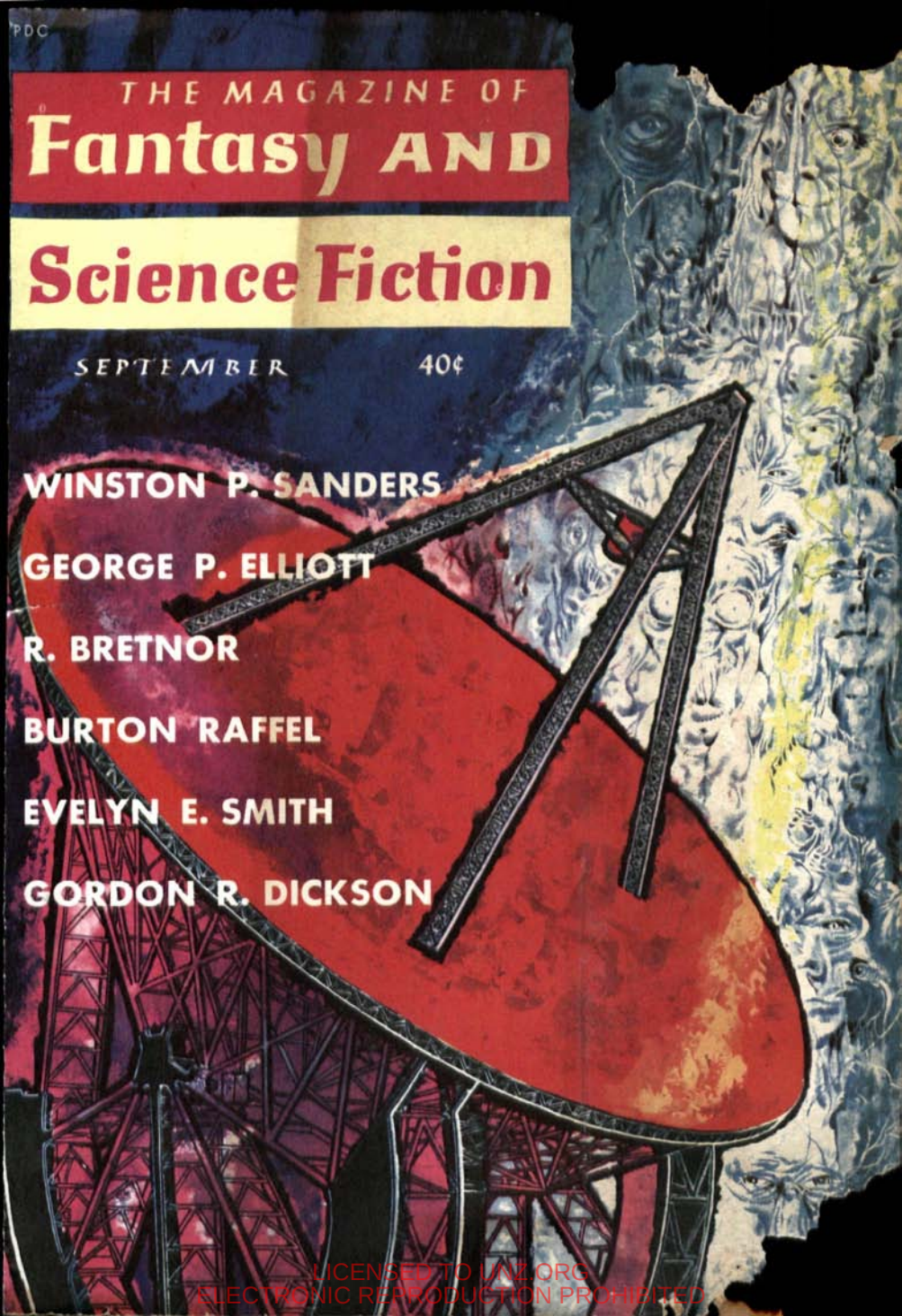
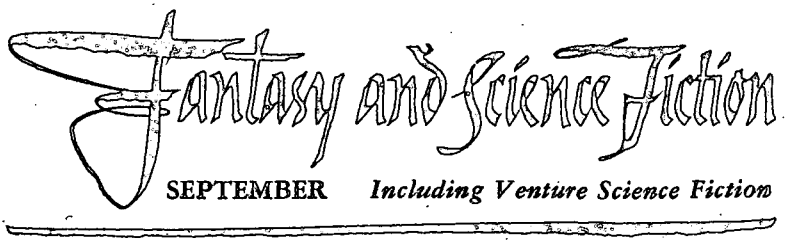



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED




SEPTEMBER *Including Venture Science Fiction*


| | | |
|---|---|---|
| The Word to Space | WINSTON P. SANDERS | 5 |
| A Day in the Suburbs | EVELYN E. SMITH | 19 |
| Goodbye (*short novelet*) | BURTON RAFFEL | 26 |
| Button, Button | GORDON R. DICKSON | 52 |
| The Man on Top | R. BRETNOR | 65 |
| *Science:* Tools of the Trade | ISAAC ASIMOV | 69 |
| *Books:* Walden Two | DAMON KNIGHT | 79 |
| The NRACP (*novelet*) | GEORGE P. ELLIOTT | 81 |
| Two in Homage | KIT REED | 111 |
| Doctor Royker's Experiment | JOSEPH WHITEHILL | 124 |
| *In this issue . . . Coming next month* | | 130 |


*Cover by Emsh*
*(illustrating "The Word to Space")*


*Joseph W. Ferman*, PUBLISHER *Robert P. Mills*, EDITOR

*The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, Volume 19, No. 3, Whole No. 112, SEPTEMBER 1960. Published monthly by Mercury Press, Inc., at 40¢ a copy. Annual subscription $4.50 in U. S. and Possessions, and Canada. $5.00 in the Pan-American Union; $5.50 in all other countries. Publication office, Concord, N. H. Editorial and general offices, 527 Madison Avenue, New York 22, N. Y. Second class postage paid at Concord, N. H. Printed in U. S. A.*


*© 1960 by Mercury Press, Inc. All rights, including translations into other languages, reserved. Submissions must be accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes; the Publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts.*


*Damon Knight*, BOOK EDITOR *Isaac Asimov*, CONTRIBUTING SCIENCE EDITOR

*J. Francis McComas*, ADVISORY EDITOR *Ruth Ferman*, CIRCULATION DIRECTOR



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# New book by Hugo-Award winner Clifford Simak

Twelve masterful, sinister science fiction stories — featuring a prophet (uncanny but unhappy) who can see 24 hours into the future; some charming extra-terrestrial aliens who live just down the road; a small animal who makes monkeys out of the Air Force — and other extraordinary characters from

**THE WORLDS OF CLIFFORD SIMAK**

**Just out. $3.75 at all bookstores.**
**Simon and Schuster,**
**Rockefeller Center, New York**

THE MAGAZINE OF
Fantasy and Science Fiction

## MARKET PLACE

### BOOKS—MAGAZINES

SCIENCE-FICTION book bargains. List free. Werewolf Bookshop, Verona 15, Pa.

SPECIALISTS: Science Fiction, Fantasy, Weird Fiction. Books, pocketbooks and magazines. Lists issued. Stephen's Book Service, 71 Third Avenue, New York 3, N. Y.

Back issue science fiction magazines, books. Free catalogs. Gerry de la Ree, 277 Howland Avenue, River Edge, N. J.

### ROCKETS

Rocket fuel chemicals, model missile kits, parts. Catalog 25¢. Central Rocket Company, Waupaca, Wisc.

### MAGIC

Giant Mystery Catalog! 160 pages thick! Most amazing catalog ever published. Nothing like it before! Rush 25¢. Free Mystery included. House of 1000 Mysteries, Dept. FS9, Trumbull, Conn.

### MISCELLANEOUS

BACK NUMBERS, overstock Fantasy and Science Fiction 1955-1959, but not all issues. 5 different issues for $1. (our selection). Dept. CN, Fantasy and Science Fiction, P.O. Box 271, Rockville Centre, N. Y.

***Do you have something to advertise to sf readers? Books, magazines, typewriters, telescopes, computers, space-drives, or misc. Use this F&SF Market Place at these low, low rates: $2.50 for minimum of ten (10) words; plus 25¢ for each additional word. Send copy and remittance to: Adv. Dept., Fantasy and Science Fiction, P.O. Box 271, Rockville Centre, N. Y.***



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

*The only world Ozma could pick up was governed by religious crackpots who refused to devote broadcast-time to any subject other than proselytizing sermons couched in pseudo-King James.*

# THE WORD TO SPACE

*by Winston P. Sanders*

*" '—begat Manod, who reigned over the People for 99 years. And in his day lawlessness went abroad in the land, wherefore the Quaternary One smote the People with ordseem* (Apparently a disease—Tr.) *and they were sore afflicted. And the preacher Jilbmish called a great prayer meeting. And when the People were assembled he cried unto them: Woe betide you, for you have transgressed against the righteous command of the Secondary and Tertiary Ones, namely, you have begrudged the Sacrifice and you have failed to beat drums* (? — Tr.) *at the rising of Nomo, even as your fathers were commanded; wherefore this evil is come upon you.' Sheemish xiv, 6.*

*"Brethren beyond the stars, let us ponder this text together. For well you know from our previous messages that ignorance of the Way, even in its least detail, is not an excuse in the sight of the Ones. 'Carry Our Way unto the ends of creation, that ye may save from the Eternal Hunger all created beings doomed by their own unwittingness.' Chubu iv, 2. Now the most elementary exegesis of the words of Jilbmish clearly demonstrated—"*

Father James Moriarty, S.J., sighed and laid down the typescript. Undoubtedly the project team of linguists, cryptographers, anthropologists, theologians and radio engineers was producing translations as accurate as anyone would ever be able to. At least until the barriers of space were somehow overleaped and men actually met the aliens, face to face on their own planet. Which wasn't going to happen in the foreseeable future.

Father Moriarty had been assured that the different English styles corresponded to a demonstrable variation in the original language. If he insisted on abso-



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lute scholarship, he could consult the Primary Version, in which the logical and mathematical arguments for every possible English rendering of every alien symbol were set forth. By now the Primary Version filled a whole library, each huge volume threshing out the significance of a few hundred words.

Fortunately, such minute precision easn't necessary for Father Moriarty's purpose. He couldn't have understood the arguments anyhow. His own science was geology. So he accepted the edited translation of the messages from Mu Cassiopeiae.

"Only why," he asked himself as he stuffed his pipe, "must they use that horrible dialect?" He touched a lighter to the charred bowl and added, "Pseudo-King James," with a bare touch of friendly malice.

A cluster of buildings appeared below. Despite lawns and gardens, the big central structure and its outlying houses looked forlorn, as if dumped there in the little valley among summer-green Virginia hills. Even the radio telescope and mast had a forsaken air about them. Everything was neatly maintained, but small and old-fashioned. Also, Moriarty thought, a good deal of the ghost town impression must be subjective, since he knew what an orphan Ozma was.

The autopilot beeped and said: "You are approaching an area where overhead flight is prohibited. The vehicle will take a course around it."

"Oh, shut up," said Moriarty. "Ever since you machines got recorded voices, you've been insufferable." He punched the LAND button. The autopilot requested permission from the autocontrol tower and got a beam. The gravicar slanted downward to the parking lot. When it had rolled to a stop, the priest got out.

He stood for a moment stretching his muscles and enjoying the sunlight. The flight had been long, several hours from Loyola University of Los Angeles; this old jalopy could barely keep minimum legal speed in the traffic lanes. Good to be here at last—yes, and to see real greenwood on the hills, after all those years in California. The air was very still. Then, a liquid note and another . . . a mocking bird?

To keep himself from becoming maudlin, he threw back his head and looked toward the great webwork of the radio telescope. Beyond those meshes, the sky was a deep gentle blue. Though Project Ozma had been going on since before he was born—for a century and a third, in fact, so that its originators were one in the history books with Aristotle and Einstein—he found it emotionally impossible to reconcile such a sky with the cold black gape of space be-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

yond, twenty-five light-years to that sun whose second planet was talking with Earth.

"Talking at Earth, I should say," he tried to smile. Perhaps after dark, when the stars were out, this would all seem less eldritch. Formerly Ozma had been in the background of his life, something one read about and made the appropriate marveling noises over, like the Jupiter expedition or the longevity process or the Rhodesian-Israeli Entente, a thing with no immediate effects on the everyday. But this hour he was here, his application accepted, an actual part of it!

He suppressed his excitement and focused on a large middle-aged man in rumpled blue tunic and slacks who was nearing him. The priest, tall and stooped and prematurely balding, walked forward. "Dr. Strand, I presume from you television interviews? This is an honor. I didn't expect the director himself to meet me."

Strand's handshake was lackadaisical and his expression unamiable. "What the hell else is there for me to do?" Embarrassed: "Uh, beg your pardon, Father."

"Quite all right. I admit, like any specialist, I wish outsiders wouldn't use technical terms so loosely, but that's a minor annoyance." Moriarty felt his own shyness fading. He remembered he was here for excellent reasons. He took a fresh drag on his pipe. "Your settlement looks peaceful," he remarked.

"Dead, you mean." Strand shrugged. "The normal condition of the project. There are just half a dozen people around at the moment."

"No more? I should have thought—"

"Look, we only use the radio telescope these days to sweep the sky in the hydrogen band for signals from other stars. That operation's been almost completely automated. Only needs a couple of maintenance men, and I myself check the tapes. Then there's my secretary, who's got the biggest sinecure in the country, and two caretakers for the buildings and grounds. Frankly, I wonder why you came here." Strand essayed a rather stiff smile. "Glad to see you, of course. Showing you around will at least break the monotony. But I don't know what you can accomplish that you couldn't do in your own office back at your college."

"I take it the translators don't work here?"

"No. Why should they? They've better facilities in Charlottesville. I suppose you know the University of Virginia is now handling that side of the project. I used to run over there every week with a new batch of tapes, but lately a big receiver right on campus has been turned over to us. The space station bucks the Cassiopeian

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

transmissions directly there, and also takes outgoing messages. Our own radio mast is quite idle."

They began to walk. "By the way," asked Strand, "where are you staying?"

"Nowhere, yet. I thought one of your dormitories—"

"M-m-m-m . . . nobody uses them any more." Strand looked reluctant. "You can talk to Joe about it, but personally I'd advise you get a room in some nearby town. Commuting's easy enough." He seemed to wrestle with himself before politeness overcame hostility. "How about a cup of coffee in my office? You must be tired from your trip."

Moriarty felt like a young bloodhound, released in a barnyard full of the most fascinating new smells and then suddenly called to heel. But he couldn't well refuse the offer. Besides, it might give him an opening to broach his real purpose in coming. "Thank you, that's very kind."

As they crossed the grounds, he added, "So you still haven't gotten any other extraterrestrial signals?"

"No, of course not. We wouldn't keep that secret! Hope's growing dim, too. Even in the southern hemisphere, Ozma's pretty well checked out most of the likely stars within range of our instruments. I suspect that until we get much more powerful equipment, Akron is the only extrasolar planet we'll ever be in touch with. And we won't be granted such equipment till we can show some worthwhile results with Akron. Talk about your vicious circles!"

Moriarty's smile turned wry. "You know," he said, "I've often suspected one of your problems in getting funds for this work has been the unfortunate coincidence that Mu Cassiopeiae II happens to be called Akron in its own principal language. With the star's astronomical name containing, from the English viewpoint, such a wanton aggregate of vowels, it was inevitable the people would nickname it Ohio."

"Spare me," groaned Strand. "The jokes about messages from Akron, Ohio were dead and rotten before either of us was born."

"I was just thinking that those jokes themselves may have been an unconscious reason for starving Ozma. Who could take a planet named Akron very seriously?"

Strand shrugged again. "Could be. The project's had nothing but trouble, ever since those cursed signals were first detected." He gave Moriarty a sharp sidewise glance. The unspoken thought went between them: *I'm afraid you're going to be still another plague on our house. A Jesuit couldn't transfer himself casually; his superiors would have to approve, at the very least. And after that, why did Washington okay your application? I know a Catholic President would be more than*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

*ordinarily ready to listen to whatever fisheating notion you came up with. But damn and blast, I've got work to do!*

They entered the main building and went through a gloomy foyer to a hall lined with locked doors. "Even so," said Moriarty, in delayed answer, "this was once a major enterprise." Coming in from brilliant daylight, he found the emptiness all the more depressing.

"Once," the director conceded wearily. "When the original Project Ozma first picked up signals from Ohi—from Mu Cassiopeiae—way back in the 1960's. Oh, they made headlines all over the world then! That was when this got set up as an independent Federal operation."

"I know," said Moriarty. To drive off the sadness from them both, he chuckled. "I've read about the old hassles. Every branch of government wanted Ozma. The Navy much resented losing it, but what with the State Department insisting this was their line of work, while the Department of the Interior argued that since the construction would be on public land— But that was before the taxpayers realized the truth. I mean, what a long, tedious, expensive process it would be, establishing communication with a nonhuman race twenty-five light-years away."

Strand opened a door. Beyond was an anteroom in which a small Nisei sat at a desk. He bounced up as Strand said, "Father Moriarty, meet my secretary, Philibert Okamura."

"An honor, Father," said the little man. "A great honor. I've been so happy you were coming. I read your classic work on the theory of planetary cores. Though I admit the mathematics got beyond me in places."

Strand raised his brows. "Oh? I knew you were a geologist, Father, but I hadn't quite understood—"

Moriarty looked at his shoes. He didn't enjoy personal attention. "That paper is nothing," he mumbled. "Just playing with equations. The Solar System doesn't have a great enough variety of planetary types for most of my conclusions to be checked. So it's only a trifling monograph."

"I wouldn't call a hundred pages of matrix algebra trifling," said Okamura. He smiled at his chief, as proudly as if he had invented the newcomer. "Math runs in his family, Dr. Strand. The Moriartys have been scientists for more than two hundred years. You are descended, arent't you, from the author of *The Dynamics of an Asteroid?*"

Since that particular ancestor was not one he cared to be reminded of, the priest said hastily, "You'll sympathize, then, with my special interest in Ozma. When you released those data about the size and density of Akron, a few

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

years ago—really, I was tempted to think God had offered us the exact case we needed to verify Theorem 8-B in my paper. Not to mention all the other details, which must be radically different from the Solar System—"

"And the biology, biochemistry, zoology, botany, anthropology, history, sociology . . . and who knows how far ahead of us they may be in some technologies? Sure. Those hopes were expressed before I was born," snapped Strand. "But what have we actually learned so far? One language. A few details of dress and appearance. An occasional datum of physical science, like that geological information you spoke of. In more than a hundred years, that's all!" He broke off. "Anything in the mail today?"

"Two dollars from a lady in Columbus, Nebraska, in memory of her sweet little Pekingese dog Chan Chu," said Okamura.

"I suppose you've heard, Father, Project Ozma is accepting private contributions," said Strand bitterly. "Anything to stretch our funds. You wouldn't believe the dodges they find in Washington to pare down the money we get. Not that the total official appropriation ever amounts to much."

"I should think," said Moriarty, "there would be a rich source of income in donations from those weird religions which have grown up in response to the preachments from Akron."

Strand's eyes bugged. "*You'd* take *their* money?"

"Why not? Better than having them spend it on proselytization."

"But as long as the only messages are that garbled gospel—"

"Additional idiocies won't make any difference. The people who've adopted the Akronite faith (or, rather, one of the dozen distorted versions) will simply modify their beliefs as more sermons pour in. You don't make total chaos worse by stirring the pot a bit more."

"Hm-m-m." Strand rubbed his chin and stared at the ceiling. Then, reluctantly: "No. We couldn't. Too many other churches would holler about favoritism. In fact, the inspiration we're giving those nut cults is one reason our project is in danger of being terminated altogether."

Okamura began with diffidence, "I heard Bishop Ryan's speech last month."

"Bishop Ryan's opinions are his own," said Moriarty. "In spite of what non-Catholics think, the Church is not a monolithic dictatorship, even in matters of faith. Unlike Bishop Ryan, I assure you the Society of Jesus would reckon it a catastrophe if communication with Akron were stopped."

"Even when all we get is religious discussion?" asked Okamura.

"Religious ranting, you mean," said Strand sourly.

Moriarty grimaced. "Correct

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

word, that. I was reading the latest translation you've released, on my way here. No sign of any improvement, is there?"

"Nope," Okamura said. "As of twenty-five years ago, at least, Akron's still governed by a fanatical theocracy out to convert the universe." He sighed. "I imagine you know the history of Ozma's contact with them? For the first seventy-five years or so, everything went smoothly. Slow and unspectacular, so that the public got bored with the whole idea, but progress was being made in understanding their language. And then—when they figured we'd learned it well enough—they started sending doctrine. Nothing but doctrine, ever since. Every message of theirs a sermon, or a text from one of their holy books followed by an analysis that my Jewish friends tell me makes the medieval rabbis look like romantic poets. Oh, once in a great while somebody slips in a few scientific data, like that geological stuff which got you so interested. I imagine their scientists are just as sick at the wasted opportunity as ours are. But with a bunch of Cotton Mathers in control, what can they do?"

"Yes, I know all that," said Moriarty. "It's a grim sort of religion. I daresay anyone who opposes its ministers is in danger of burning at the stake, or whatever the Akronite equivalent may be."

Okamura seemed so used to acting as dragoman for visitors who cared little and knew less about Ozma, that he reeled off another string of facts the priest already had by heart. "Communication has always been tough. After the project founders first detected the signals, fifty years must pass between our acknowledgment and their reply to that. Of course, they'd arranged it well. Their initial message ran three continuous months before repeating itself. In three months one can transmit a lot of information; one can go all the way from 'two plus two equals four' to basic symbology and telling what band a sonic 'cast will be sent on if there's an answer. Earth's own transmission could be equally long and carefully thought out. Still, it was slow. You can't exactly have a conversation across twenty-five light-years. All you can do is become aware of each other's existence and then start transmitting more or less continuously, meanwhile interpreting the other fellow's own steady flow of graded data. But if it weren't for those damned fanatics, we'd know a lot more by now than we do.

"As it is, we can only infer a few things. The theocracy must be planet-wide. Otherwise we'd be getting different messages from some other country on Akron. If they have interstellar radio equipment, they must also have weapons by which an ideological dictatorship could establish itself over

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a whole world, as Communism nearly did here in the last century. The structure of the language, as well as various other hints, proves the Akronites are mentally quite humanlike, however odd they look physically. We just had the bad luck to contact them at the exact point in their history when they were governed by this crusading religion."

Okamura stopped for breath, giving Strand a chance to grunt, "Ozma's characteristic bad luck. But instead of gassing about things we all know as well as we know the alphabet, suppose you get us some coffee."

"Oh. Sorry!" The secretary blushed and trotted out.

Strand led Moriarty on into the main office. It was a spacious room with a view of gardens, radioscope, and wooded hillside. Where the walls weren't lined with books, they were hung with pictures. The most conspicuous was a composite photograph of an Akronite, prepared from the crude television images which Ozma's private satellite station had recently become able to receive. The being gave an impression of height; and they had in fact reported themselves as standing ten *axuls* tall on the average, where an *axul* turned out to equal approximately one-point-on-one million cadmium red wavelengths. The gaunt body was hidden by robes. A Terrestrial request for a picture of nude anatomy had been rejected with Comstockian prudishness. But one could see the Akronite had three-toed feet and four-fingered hands. The crested head and long-nosed face were so unhuman they had nothing grotesque about them: rather, those features were dignified and intelligent. Hard to believe that someone who looked like this had written in dead seriousness:

*The next word in the sentence from Aejae xliii, 3 which we are considering is 'ruchiruchin,' an archaic word concerning whose meaning there was formerly some dispute. Fortunately, the advocates of the erroneous theory that it means 'very similar' have now been exterminated and the glorious truth that it means 'quite similar' is firmly established."*

But the human race had its share of such minds.

Besides this picture, there were photographs of a Martian landscape and Jupiter seen from space, and a stunning astronomical view of the Andromeda Galaxy. The books tended to be very old, including works by Oberth and Ley. Through a veil of pipe smoke, Moriarty studied Michael Strand's worn countenance. Yes, the man was a dreamer—of a most splendid dream, now dying in other Earthly souls. No other type could have kept going with such heroic stubbornness, through a lifetime of disappointments. But

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he might on that very account prove hard to deal with, when Moriarty's scheme was advanced. Best, perhaps, to lead up to it gradually. . . .

"Siddown." Strand waved at a chair and seated himself behind his desk. A breeze from the open window ruffled his gray hair. He took a cigaret from a box, struck it with a ferocious motion and drew heavily on the smoke. Moriarty lowered his own long body.

"I assume," said the priest, "that your beamcasts to Mu Cassiopeiae continue to be of factual data about ourselves."

"Sure. It's either that, or stop sending altogether. Every so often somebody gets the bright idea that we should ask them to cut out their infernal propaganda. But of course we don't. If they can't get the hint from our own messages, a direct request would probably offend them so much that they'd quit transmitting anything."

"You're wise. I've had some acquaintance with religious monomaniacs." Moriarty tried to blow a smoke ring, but the air was too restless. "The information we send must help keep scientific curiosity alive on Akron. As witness those bootleg data we do sometimes get." He smiled an apology. "I hope I may think of myself as a member of your team, Dr. Strand?"

The other man's mouth drew into a harsh line. He leaned across the desk. "Let's be frank with each other," he said. "What are you actually here for?"

"Well," said Moriarty in his mildest voice, "those geological facts were what first snapped me to attention as regards Ozma."

"Come, now! You know very well that we won't be getting more than one quantitative datum a year, if we're lucky. And what we do get is released in the scientific journals. You don't have to join us to know everything we find out. You could have stayed at Loyola. Instead . . . there was pressure put on me. To be perfectly honest, I didn't want you, even on this temporary appointment of yours. But word came from the White House that you had, quote, 'the warmest Presidential recommendation.' What could I do?"

"I'm sorry. I never intended —"

"You're here for religious reasons, aren't you? The Catholic Church doesn't like this flood of alien propaganda."

"Do you?"

Strand blinked, taken aback. "Well . . . no," he said. "Certainly not. It's a repulsive religion. And the home-grown crank cults based on it are even worse." He struck his desk with a knotted fist. "But as long as I'm director, we'll keep on publishing all we learn. I may not like the messages from Akron, or their effect on Earth, but I will not be party to suppressing them!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Moriarty could not resist a sarcastic jab, though he set himself a small penance for it: "Then of course you'll wish to release the whole inside story of Project Ozma?"

"What?" Strand's expression turned blank. "There's never been anything secret about our work."

"No. Except the motivations behind some of the things done in the past. Which are obvious to anyone with a training in, ah, Jesuitry." Moriarty raised a hand, palm out. "Oh, please don't misunderstand. Your predecessors desired nothing except to keep Ozma alive, which is an entirely honorable desire. And yet, as long as we're alone, why not admit some of their methods were, shall I say, disingenuous?"

Strand reddened. "What're you getting at?"

"Well, just consider the history of this enterprise. After the first flush of enthusiasm had departed, when the government and the public saw what a long hard pull lay ahead. Even more so, after the sermons began to come and outright public hostility developed. There was a continual scramble for tax funds to keep Ozma going. And . . . I've looked into the old records of Congressional hearings. At first the director played on a national desire for scientific prestige. 'We mustn't let the Russians get ahead of us in this, too.' Then, when war broke out, the argument was that maybe we could get valuable technical information from Akron—a ludicrous argument, but enough Congressmen fell for it. After the war, with no foreign competition to worry about, the government almost killed Ozma again. But a calculatedly mawkish account of paraplegic veterans returning to work here was circulated, and the American Legion pulled your chestnuts out of the fire. When that stunt had been used to death, the Readjustment was in full swing, jobs were scarce, it was argued that Ozma created employment. Again, ridiculous, but it worked for a while. When conditions improved and Ozma was once more about to get the ax, one director retired and a Negro was appointed in his place. Ergo, no one dared vote against Ozma for fear of being called prejudiced. Et cetera, et cetera. The project has gone on like that for a hundred years.

"So what?" Strand's voice was sullen.

"So nothing. I don't say a word against shrewd politics." Moriarty's pipe had gone out. He made a production of relighting it, to stretch out the silence. At what he judged to be the critical instant, he drawled:

"I only suggest we continue in the same tradition."

Strand leaned back in his swivel chair. His glum hostility was dissolving into bewilderment. "What-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

're you getting at? Look here, uh, Father, it's physically impossible for us to change the situation on Akron—"

"Oh?"

"What d' you mean?"

"We can send a reply to those sermons."

"What?" Strand almost went over backward.

"Other than scientific data, I mean."

"What the devil!" Strand sprang to his feet. His wrath returned, to blaze in face and eyes, to thicken his tones and lift one fist.

"I was afraid of this!" he exclaimed. "The minute I heard a priest was getting into the project, I expected this. You blind, bloody, queercollared imbecile! You and the President—you're no better than those characters on Akron—do you think I'll let my work be degraded to such ends? Trying to convert another planet—and to one particular sect? By everything *I* believe holy, I'll resign first! Yes, and tell the whole country what's going on!"

Moriarty was startled at the violence of the reaction he had gotten. But he had seen worse, on other occasions. He smoked quietly until a pause in the tirade gave him a chance to say:

"Yes, my modest proposal does have the President's okay. And yes, it will have to be kept confidential. But neither he nor I are about to dictate to you. Nor are we about to spend the tax money of Protestants, Jews, Buddhists, unbelievers . . . even Akronists . . . on propagating our own Faith."

Strand, furiously pacing, stopped dead. The blood went slowly out of his cheeks. He gaped.

"For that matter," said Moriarty, "the Roman Catholic Church is not interested in converting other planets."

"Huh?" choked Strand.

"The Vatican decided more than a hundred years ago, back when space travel was still a mere theory, that the mission of Our Lord was to Earth only, to the human race. Other intelligent species did not share in the Fall and therefore do not require redemption. Or, if they are not in a state of grace—and the Akronites pretty clearly are not—then God will have made His own provision for them. I assure you, Dr. Strand, all I want is a free scientific and cultural exchange with Mu Cassiopeiae."

The director reseated himself, leaned elbows on desk and stared at the priest. He wet his lips before saying: "What do you think we should do, then?"

"Why, break up their theocracy. What else? There's no sin in that! My ecclesiastical superiors have approved my undertaking. They agree with me that the Akronist faith is so unreasonable it must be false, even for Akron. Its

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bad social effects on Earth confirm this opinion. Naturally, the political repercussions would be disastrous if an attempt to subvert Akronism were publicly made. So any such messages we transmit must be kept strictly confidential. I'm sure you can arrange that."

Strand picked his cigaret out of the ashtray where he had dropped it, looked at the butt in a stupefied fashion, ground it out and took a fresh one.

"Maybe I got you wrong," he said grudgingly. "But, uh, how do you propose to do this? Wouldn't you have to try converting them to some other belief?"

"Impossible," said Moriarty. "Let's suppose we did transmit our Bible, the Summa, and a few similar books. The theocracy would suppress them at once, and probably cut off all contact with us."

He grinned. "However," he said, "in both the good and the bad senses of the word, casuistry is considered a Jesuit specialty." He pulled the typescript he had been reading from his coat pocket. "I haven't had a chance to study this latest document as carefully as I have the earlier ones, but it follows the typical pattern. For example, one is required 'to beat drums at the rising of Nomo,' which I gather is the third planet of the Ohio System. Since we don't have any Nomo, being in fact the third planet of our system, it might offhand seem as if we're damned. But the theocracy doesn't believe that, or it wouldn't bother with us. Instead, their theologians, studying the astronomical data we sent, have used pages and pages of hairsplitting logic to decide that for us Nomo is equivalent to Mars."

"What of it?" asked Strand; but his eyes were kindling.

"Certain questions occur to me," said Moriarty. "If I went up in a gravicar, I would see Mars rise sooner than would a person on the ground. None of the preachings we've received has explained which rising is to be considered official at a given longitude. A particularly devout worshipper nowadays could put an artificial satellite in such an orbit that Mars was always on its horizon. Then he could beat drums continuously, his whole life long. Would this gain him extra merit or would it not?"

"I don't see where that matters," said Strand.

"In itself, hardly. But it raises the whole question of the relative importance of ritual and faith. Which in turn leads to the question of faith versus works, one of the basic issues of the Reformation. As far as that goes, the schism between Catholic and Orthodox Churches in the early Middle Ages turned, in the last analysis, on one word in the Credo, *filioque*. Does the Holy Ghost proceed from the Father and the Son,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

or from the Father alone? You may think this is a trivial question, but to a person who really believes his religion it is not. Oceans of blood have been spilled because of that one word.

"Ah . . . returning to this sermon, though. I also wonder about the name 'Nomo.' The Akronite theologians conclude that in our case, Nomo means Mars. But this is based on the assumption that, by analogy with their own system, the next planet outward is meant. An assumption for which I can recall no justification in any of the scriptures they've sent us. Could it not be the next planet inward—Venus for us? But then their own 'Nomo' might originally have been Mu Cassiopeiae I, instead of III. In which case they've been damning themselves for centuries by celebrating the rising of the wrong planet!"

Strand pulled his jaw back up. "I take it, then," he said huskily, "you want to—"

"To send them some arguments much more elaborately reasoned than these examples, which I've simply made up on the spot," Moriarty answered. "I've studied the Akronist faith in detail . . . with two millennia of Christian disputation and haggling to guide me. I've prepared a little reply. It starts out fulsomely, thanking them for showing us the light and begging for further information on certain points which seem a trifle obscure. The rest of the message consists of quibbles, puzzles, and basic issues."

"And you really think— How long would this take to transmit?"

"Oh, I should imagine about one continuous month. Then from time to time, as they occur to us, we can send further inquiries."

Father James Moriarty leaned back, crossed his legs, and puffed benign blue clouds.

Okamura entered with three cups of coffee on a tray. Strand gulped. In an uneven voice he said, "Put 'em down and close the door, please. We've got work to do."

*Epilogue*

Moriarty was hoeing the cabbages behind the chapter house—which his superior had ordered as an exercise in humility—and speculating about the curious fossil beds recently discovered on Callisto—which his superior had not forbidden—when his wristphone buzzed. He detested the newfangled thing and wore it only because he was supposed to keep himself accessible. Some silly call was always interrupting his thoughts just when they got interesting. He delivered himself of an innocent but sonorous Latin phrase and pressed the ACCEPT button. "Yes?" he said.

"This is Phil Okamura." The tiny voice became unintelligible. Moriarty turned up the volume.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Since he had passed the century mark his ears hadn't been so good; though praise God, the longevity treatment kept him otherwise sound. "—remember? The director of Project Ozma."

"Oh, yes." His heart thumped. "Of course I remember. How are you? We haven't met for . . . must be five years or more."

"Time sure passes. But I had to call you right away, Jim. Transmission from Akron resumed three hours ago."

"What?" Moriarty glanced at the sky. Beyond that clear blue, the stars and all God's handiwork! "What's their news?"

"Plenty. They explained that the reason we haven't received anything from them for a decade was that their equipment got wrecked in some of the fighting. But now things have quieted down. All those conflicting sects have been forced to reach a modus vivendi.

Apparently the suggestions we sent; incidental to our first disruptive questions seventy-five years ago—and based on our own experience—were helpful: separation of church and state, and so on. Now the scientists are free to communicate with us, uncontrolled by anyone else. They're sure happy about that! The transition was painful, but three hundred years of stagnation on Akron have ended. They've got a huge backlog of data to give us. So if you want your geology straight off the tapes, you better hurry here. All the journals are going to be snowed under with our reports."

"*Deo gratias.* I'll ask my superior at once—I'm sure he'll let me—and catch the first robus headed your way." Father Moriarty switched off the phone and hobbled toward the house. After a moment he remembered he'd forgotten the hoe. Well, let somebody else pick the thing up. He had work to do!

**Coming . . .**

A new story by the Pulitzer Prize winning author of ADVISE AND CONSENT:

***Something*** **Allen Drury**

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

*The inside story of why such a disproportionate percentage of automobile accidents are passed off as being due to the ineptitude of women drivers . . . why suburban newspapers carry so little real news . . . why supermarket prices are higher than they should be—by one who really* knows.

# A DAY IN THE SUBURBS

*by Evelyn E. Smith*

"DUCK YOUR HEAD, MARGIE!" Mrs. Skinner cried, as bullets splatted against the car windows.

"The glass is bulletproof," Margie observed, twisting her head around so she could see out of the rear window.

"Don't count on that," her mother said grimly. "I understand the Flat-Tops have a fifth column in Detroit."

Margie squirmed back into place. "It was that old Helen Kempf shooting at us. Couldn't hit the side of a barn door!"

"Managed to hit the side of a car, though. I hope we'll have time for a quick respray before your father gets home. Thank God for fast-drying paint."

"When I go back to school, I'm going to get her alone in the locker room and kill her," Margie said.

"You know school's a truce zone," Mrs. Skinner murmured, her eyes fixed on the road. No chance of mines—the Flat-Tops used this stretch, too—but there could always be a deadfall. "We have a treaty with the board."

"The board!" Margie scoffed. "They're mostly Old Windmill Manorites. Their kids go to private schools or something; their classrooms are practically empty."

Mrs. Skinner only half heard the words. They were passing through hill country now, and her eyes alertly scanned the shrubbery masking the embankments. Was that a gun muzzle glittering in the sunlight or just a piece of broken bottle?

"You know what I think of the Old Windmill Manorites?" Margie offered. And she proceeded to tell her mother quite explicitly.

Mrs. Skinner's attention was caught by that. Her lips thinned. "Margery, I don't know where you pick up such language."



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"The Flat-Tops talk that way in class all the time."

"Don't lie to your mother. The teacher wouldn't let even a Flat-Top use language like that in class. You got it from the boys."

"Well, they're *our* boys."

"Boys are boys. They—"

*"Watch out!"* Margie shrieked.

Mrs. Skinner's high-heeled foot came down hard on the accelerator. The sedan leaped ahead. Behind, an enormous boulder crashed into the road, spattering dirt on the rear window. Mrs. Skinner's forehead was beaded with sweat. "Next time," she said evenly, "don't distract me when we're going through the pass."

Margie began to weep softly.

"Did you see who it was?"

"Mrs. Pascal and all the kids except the baby," Margie sobbed. "They're all home with nothing to do on account of Easter vacation."

"Must be at her wits end with eight children to amuse. Still, that's her problem." A faint smile flickered over Mrs. Skinner's face as she made swift plans.

"Going to get her at the next PTA meeting, Mom?"

Mrs. Skinner smiled enigmatically, and Margie asked no further questions. Her mother had always been pretty much of a loner. The other Peaked-Roofers might have resented that, but she was also the best shot in the development. Skilfully, she drove through the Brightview entrance to the parking lot. "Better take your gun," she advised, as they got out of the car. "I know the Shopping Center's a truce zone, but I didn't like the look of those spikes in the road."

However, since the Flat-Tops and the Peaked-Roofers shared the $15,990-$17,990 entrance to the Supermarket, the manager made the Skinners check their guns at his desk. "This is a quiet store, Mrs. Skinner," he told her, "and I aim to keep it that way. The fist fights are bad enough. Last week, Mrs. Knowland and Mrs. Maltese slugged it out in Dairy Products and smashed a crate of extra-large Jersey eggs. If only you ladies would realize that all that kind of thing goes into the overhead, and makes prices go up."

The Skinners maneuvered a shopping cart out of the phalanx, and started their promenade down the aisles. When they passed Flat-Tops, there were hostile stares, and an occasional sideswipe with a cart. If they encountered fellow Peaked-Roofers, they could stop to pass the time of day and exchange news that didn't get into the local papers because sometimes local papers fell into husbands' hands. "Watch out for a woman who's been coming around saying she collects for the Anti-Sebhorrea Foundation," Mrs. Bel-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ton warned. "She's a Flat-Top casing the Brightview houses. Smart idea of yours to put curtains in the picture windows."

"Someone else would've thought of it if I hadn't," Mrs. Skinner said modestly.

Near Baked Goods she and Margie met Mrs. Richmond, bursting with gossip. "Have you heard what happened to little Ava Pratt? The Flat-Tops got her yesterday. Ambushed her in an unimproved lot."

Mrs. Skinner made clucking sounds with her tongue.

"Can I have chocolate-covered graham crackers, huh, Mom?" Mom?" Margie asked.

"No," Mrs. Skinner said, "they make you come out in spots."

"They don't think she'll live," Mrs. Richmond continued.

"How about Oatmeal Crunchies?"

"All right, the small package. . . . What did they tell the father?"

Mrs. Richmond shrugged. "The usual thing—a sex maniac. What else? The men are going to get up a posse and beat the bushes tonight."

Both ladies gave rueful little laughs. "I do hope nobody gets hurt," Mrs. Skinner said tolerantly. . . . "There, you see," she admonished Margie, as they trundled past Condiments and Jellies, "don't ever go into an empty lot alone. You've got to learn not to take any chances, not if you want to grow up and have a husband and children of your own and live in a nice development like Brightview."

Margie jumped, but not quickly enough. A chunky jar of olives toppled off a pyramid of like jars and glanced off her shoulder. "Why can't I live right *in* Brightview?" she asked, rubbing her injury.

"Because it'll be old when you grow up. It won't have the latest modern conveniences. People will look down on you if you don't move into a new house as soon as you're married. . . . Darn it, no jellied peacocks' tongues again!"

"There's plenty of it in the Old Windmill Manor section," Margie said, peering through the shatterproof amethyst glass partition that separated the $30,600-ers from the lower income brackets. Dim tweed-suited figures could be seen moving about in those remote regions. "Cans and cans."

"Don't let them *see* you looking!" Mrs. Skinner cried, pulling her away. "What they do or say or have is no concern of ours! *We don't care!*"

A Flat-Top woman, torn between two brands of marinated venison, glanced up. "Some day us Flat-Tops and you Peaked-Roofers should declared an armistice and go up there and *get those* Old Windmill Manorites," she de-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

clared in a low passionate voice. "Burn their houses to the ground. Teach 'em to think they're better than us."

For a moment they stood there, united in a common bond of hatred. Then. . . . "Come on, Margie," Mrs. Skinner said; "we'll have to make do with roast agouti hash."

"Just a minute, Mom." Taking careful aim around Canned Fish, Margie let fly with her slingshot. There was a loud howl. "That'll learn Marilyn Sforza to push olive jars at me," Margie muttered, holstering the slingshot. Her mother patted her on the head.

A helicopter that was hovering over the Supermarket sprayed them with bullets as they sprinted for the parking lot. "This is too much!" Mrs. Skinner gasped, when they were inside the car. "I've got her number, and I'm going to report her. A little sniping —well, that's excusable—but strafing is going entirely too far!"

Margie had learned her lesson, and she was silent as they rolled down the highway. Mrs. Skinner's sharp eyes darted from side to side, but danger came from behind: a sports car full of hooting Flat-Top mothers raced up and crowded them off the road. For a moment. Mrs. Skinner felt panic, as the car began to topple; then it sank a few feet and stopped in a ditch. As she and Margie were lifting it onto the road again they heard the crisp sound of an explosion. When they were on their way once more, they found that the bridge ahead of them had been blown up. The Flat-Top car was a twisted mass of wreckage. "That was meant for us," Mrs. Skinner said with satisfaction, as she headed the car toward the detour. "Somebody got her signals mixed."

She and Margie laughed companionably. "Bet it's the same gang raided Mrs. Perkins' bridge party and ate all the refreshments and killed the baby," Margie observed.

"I wouldn't be surprised," Mrs. Skinner agreed. "Lucky it was only a boy."

"What did they tell Mr. Perkins this time?"

"Said he fell out of the crib. Of course the doctor backed him up. All the doctors are with us." Mrs. Skinner fingered her machine pistol lovingly.

"They better be. We'd pump those quacks full of lead if they squealed on us."

"Told on us, Margie. Or, better yet, informed."

"Informed on us," Margie repeated obligingly.

When they pulled up outside the little Cape Cod—one of a row of almost identical Cape Cods—Rock, Margie's older brother, was moodily weeding the lawn. "Get the groceries all right?" he asked. with a faint, contemptuous smile.

"Of course," his mother said,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I always get the groceries all right."

He squatted on the sidewalk, examining the bullet nicks in the car. "Wait until Dad gets a load of that!"

"He's not going to. You're going to spray it with Quik-Dry."

He stood up, facing her. "Suppose I don't. Suppose I tell him the truth for once.

Their eyes met on a level. He was growing up, she thought with a pang. Soon he would have to go. But Margie would always be hers, even after she got married and moved away. . . . "Suppose I tell him about that money you took from my bag—"

He licked his lips. "But I didn't —"

"And about the passes you made at Sue Richmond."

"I wouldn't touch Sue Richmond with a. . . . Well, all right, you've got me cornered," he said bitterly. "He'd never take my word against yours. He'd never believe me—"

"That's it; he wouldn't," Mrs. Skinner agreed, regretting what she must do, but knowing there was no other course. "You're not the only boy in Brightview—or in Marcus Park, either. They all try to tell their fathers."

"Mom," he said, frowning, "suppose I go to college and I finish and get to be a commuter like Dad and I get married, and—and this girl and I go live in a development, and the houses are all modern. With flat roofs, I mean."

"You wouldn't do that," she said, after a pause. "After all, you're still my son. Now hurry up, get the groceries out and then paint the car." She and Margie walked into the house with quick little feminine steps and shut the door behind them.

"He'll be going soon, won't he?" Margie asked sadly.

Mrs. Skinner put her arm around the little girl. "I'm afraid so. And, when he comes back, he'll have forgotten everything, or think it was . . . just his imagination. He may even go to a psychiatrist about it."

"But we'll always know, won't we, Mom?"

"We'll always know," Mrs. Skinner said. "Because we're the ones who'll always have to take care of things."

Mr. Skinner came in heartily on the 6:03. He kissed his wife and daughter and slid behind the wheel of the car. "Have a nice day, dear?" Mrs. Skinner asked.

"Pretty hectic," he laughed. "Marshall flubbed as usual, and Winterhalter said he was going to cancel. The order was for ten carloads . . . which isn't exactly peanuts."

"My, I should say not!"

"So the boss said to me: 'Henry, you go over and see if you can talk some sense into old Winter-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

halter.' Well, first Winterhalter wouldn't talk at all; he was so mad. Honestly, I thought he was going to slug me with my own sample case."

Mr. Skinner chuckled, and Mrs. Skinner laughed gently along with him.

"Then he calmed down and we talked things over, and finally he agreed to let the order stand," Mr. Skinner said, his voice thick with modesty. "Only, he said next time the boss should send me instead of Marshall, if he wanted any more orders. The boss was—well—pretty enthusiastic."

"I should think he would be!" Mrs. Skinner said in her gentle voice.

"He said he wanted to show his gratitude in some way more tangible than words, and, when I get my pay envelope next week, I'd see what he meant."

"That's wonderful, dear. We certainly can use more money."

"Buy yourself pretty things, eh?" Mr. Skinner said fondly. "Your day go all right?"

"The usual routine," she told him.

"Must be pretty dull for you girls. Tell you what, why don't you and Margie go into town tomorrow and take in a matinee. Then I'll meet you for dinner; how's that?"

To get to the city, you had to pass Happydale Homes and Schlossman's Park, cut right through Chez Vous Woods and skim the edge of Paradise Ranches. It was rumored that the Paradise Rancheros had atomic warheads on their guns. "Well, to tell you the truth, Henry," Mrs. Skinner said, "I don't like the idea of driving through all that city traffic."

He took one arm off the wheel and squeezed her shoulders. "That's the trouble with living in the suburbs. It's made a real little country mouse out of you."

"I like it here," Mrs. Skinner said. "And you'd better keep both hands on the wheel, Henry."

"I could practically drive up this street with my toes," Mr. Skinner boasted. "It's as safe as houses. I can't figure out why there always seem to be so many accidents around here during the day. Women drivers, I guess."

"Don't be narrow-minded, Henry," Mrs. Skinner smiled. She leaned back in the seat and closed her eyes. She could relax. The street was safe now. From five-thirty in the evening to eight-thirty in the morning, and all weekends and holidays, there would be no danger.

Mr. Skinner's eyes dreamed on the road. "Tell you what: if the raise is as big as I expect, as I—" he laughed deprecatingly—"deserve, and if I get another one next year we could start thinking about a new house. Maybe one in —" he dropped the words with

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

careful casualness—"old Windmill Manor."

He couldn't see Mrs. Skinner's face crumple, Margie's eyes widen in panic. But he heard the silence. "What's the matter? Don't you *want* to move to Old Windmill Manor? Don't you want to live a little better?"

"Our friends are here in Brightview, Henry."

"But, for heavens' sake, the Manor is just the other side of the highway. They could come to visit you. And you'll make new friends."

"After all, Mom," Margie said pensively, "the houses at Old Windmill Manor do have peaked roofs. Lots of peaks."

"Gables," Mrs. Skinner told her, "that's what you call them, gables." And Margie was right. Gables could not be considered in the same light as flat roofs; they were, rather, the ultimate in peaks. She pictured herself in tweeds moving softly through cathedral-ceilinged amethyst aisles where there would be jellied peacocks' tongues all the time . . . while her Brightview friends—only, of course, they wouldn't be her friends any more—pressed envious noses against the bullet-proof shatterproof, purple glass.

"You mean you wouldn't *like* to move to Old Windmill Manor!" Mr. Skinner's voice rose to the maximum of incredulity.

She took a little time to answer. "Of course I'd hate to leave the old house," she said at last. "We've spent so many happy years there together." And she looked fondly up into his face. "But the Manor would be so nice for the children. . . ."

It would be much better for the children, she told herself. Safer, for one thing. If the Paradise Rancheros had atomic weapons, it was only a question of months before the Old Mill Manorites would have them also. Conservative they might be, but not reactionary. And, of course, their weapons would be bigger and better, though not shinier, than everyone else's . . . like everything the Old Mill Manorites had or believed or were. We'll fit in, Mrs. Skinner thought, mentally reviewing and discarding most of her present wardrobe. We'll fit in fine.

---

**Coming . . .**

***From Shadowed Places*** **Richard Matheson**

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

*An ex-English teacher (among other experiences, 2 years as an instructor with the Ford Foundation English Language Teaching Program in Indonesia), and now a New York lawyer, Burton Raffel has sold poems and translations from Indonesian and Anglo Saxon to The Atlantic Monthly and various little magazines. Though "Goodbye" is Mr. Raffel's first published fiction, a group of his stories has been selected for inclusion in Scribner's* SHORT STORY 3, *out this fall—and that's a book you may well want to pick up, if you are as impressed as we with this persuasive, frightening picture of a normal sort of man in the grip of an authority which, as a citizen, he helped create, but which, he gradually realizes, he in no way understands.*

# GOODBYE

## by Burton Raffel

ONE

THE FOG WAS THIN AND DID not bother him. He strolled casually back and forth, from the edge of the road to the beginning of the wood, smoking one cigarette after another with quiet enjoyment. Small clusters of droplets collected on his raincoat, and the misty air did strange things with the smoke as he exhaled, almost reaching out to absorb and muffle it. And why should he have been disturbed? He had been sent on this sort of job before, he was an old hand. It was good to get out, to be on one's own again—as much as that was possible, now. He smoothed down the lapel of his coat, and remembered a passing reflection of himself, caught in a window. He had seemed very official, very trim and authoritative. He smiled, tapping off a long ash. He *was* official, authoritative. It was good to be back.

He was glad, too, that the fellow was late. There was no hurry about these things; they were inevitable and might just as well be



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

taken calmly, for as much incidental pleasure as one could find. There was no doubt that McQuellen would appear, alone, lost, hunting for a place with a phone or a garage. It wasn't necessary that he be exactly on schedule; allowances were always made for that kind of error. His car would have broken down along this deserted stretch of road—what difference would a mile or two in either direction make?—and he would be coming. All his paths, now, led here, to where he was relaxedly awaited. The idea of an "escape" was simply absurd. No one ever evaded this unexpected encounter. No one.

The hill wound down from the left, twisting sharply once and then sprawling straight across the flatland. From his lowland post the man in the belted raincoat glanced up, pausing. There was nothing visible, but he stood motionless, his cigarette glowing dimly in the pale light. He might have been watching, or sniffing, or, with an inner vision, expecting the unseen.

Half a minute later a head popped into view, then shoulders and a body, walking swiftly down the hill, hands jammed irritatedly into pockets, eyes turned toward the cracked macadam of the road. He was tall, lean, angry; he was hatless and coatless, obviously unprepared for a late afternoon stroll along a foggy, cold and uninhabited countryside. With a knowing smile the man watching from below dropped his cigarette into the wet grass. It was time.

"Mr. McQuellen?" For the sake of form the initial contact was always made to seem tentative, uncertain.

"What the hell!" McQuellen jumped to the side, almost falling in his frightened surprise.

The man in the raincoat stepped onto the road.

"I'm sorry if I startled you," he explained reassuringly. "There's no cause for alarm."

McQuellen stared suspiciously. His hands were out of his pockets, his fists tensely clenched.

"Who the hell are you? What do you want?"

The stranger reached out a hand.

"My name's Q. Shall we continue down the road?" he proposed easily. McQuellen ignored the outstretched hand.

"No, damn it." He'd recovered his balance—and his anger. His posture was threatening. "I don't need any company. On your way, go peddle your papers."

Neither man moved.

"Mr. McQuellen?" the stranger repeated softly.

McQuellen came closer, peering belligerently.

"Shall we continue down the road?" the stranger said again.

McQuellen stopped, almost more puzzled than indignant.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You don't know me," he declared firmly.

"It's a long way to the nearest house," the stranger went on.

McQuellen's hand went back into his pockets.

"You're sure of that," he snorted sarcastically.

The stranger nodded.

"Quite sure. Shall we go on?"

McQuellen looked up ahead, considering the white ribbon of macadam as it wandered desolately on. The tangled trees on either side of the road were dense and regular, like thickly planted fence posts or hugely overgrown walls. And the light mist that hung all the way to the horizon was as soft and motionless as something never disturbed by anything living. It was a long, wet way.

"How do you know my name?" he wondered, his hostility ebbing. The stranger seemed to mean no harm, in spite of his oddly cocksure manner. This could have been an appointment, a meeting arranged to discuss business or policy—had it been back in the city, where business was conducted. What was conducted out here?

"Were you waiting for me?" he continued.

The stranger offered him a cigarette. He refused, though he badly wanted one. It was one thing to talk; that was no real physical contact. That was leaving the stranger in limbo, an apparition that might disappear at any moment. To smoke his tobacco would be establishing a positive link, recognizing the rightness of this peculiar encounter. Watching the other man puff contentedly, his eyes half closing in pleasure, McQuellen had a queer feeling that all this was simply an illusion, a disordered fiction from his disordered brain. Which was a doubly queer feeling, for McQuellen was not in the habit of questioning his own sanity. He'd never before had any reason.

The stranger gave him an inquiring glance, and McQuellen fell into step with him. Why not?

"Do you live out here?" he asked, taking a new tack.

Q did not seem to hear.

"Don't tell me," McQuellen laughed, "that your car broke down too."

"Don't trifle," Q said, his manner gently authoritative. For a moment McQuellen was struck dumb.

"For Christ's sake," he finally exclaimed.

"Please be quiet," Q insisted softly, "so I can begin."

Their footsteps, steady and muffled, scratched along the road. McQuellen laughed; there was nothing much else he could do.

"Look, little man," he answered breezily. Q was two or three inches shorter. "There's a limit even to a joke."

Q sighed.

"Do you still wonder how I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

knew you, knew you were coming?"

"You're damned right I do," McQuellen replied with a smile that tried to be tolerant. "If you'd give me a straight answer maybe I'd find out."

Q slowly blew out a long puff of smoke, watching it quickly blend with the fog. He'd forgotten this side of the assignment; it was easy to forget. After all, he knew and they did not. They never knew, and never believed. At least, not at first. There wasn't much they could do about it, later. So they couldn't just be calm, resigned. They had to be persuaded, as this hot-tempered fellow would have to be. Not forced: things weren't done that way. Compulsion would spoil everything. They would have to be half-led, half-pushed, until, sooner or later, they discovered.

"Don't stop," Q told him, a little tiredly. He'd have to request a different assignment for a while —he caught himself in time. It was a dangerous thought. One did not request, one only accepted. "Don't stop, don't make any phone calls—"

"What the hell are you talking about?" McQuellen broke in.

"Leave everything," Q went on.

"For Christ's sake," McQuellen swore. "Who in the name of all that's holy do you think you're talking to? I'm Peter McQuellen. I'm coming home from a vacation."

"I know," Q assured him briefly. He was too kindly for this sort of role. He stiffened inwardly. This was not the way; he would be found out unless he proceeded more according to instructions.

"You know." McQuellen stopped and turned to him. "You know," he repeated, once again angry. "You're loony," he declared, "you're a grade A nut. Go away and leave me alone before I turn you in. Scram."

"Mr. McQuellen," Q began again.

"No more," he was quickly interrupted. "God damn it, I've had enough of this. So help me, loony or no, I'll clout you. And I'm not fooling."

They were standing in the middle of the deserted road, facing each other, McQuellen pointing a threatening finger in Q's face.

Q took off his raincoat and laid it down in front of him.

"Here, you'll need this. Remember, what you've been, what you've had, is yours no longer. You can do nothing to change things back; things never change back, once it has been decided."

"Decided?" McQuellen almost roared. All his irritation, piling up since a brand new car had inexplicably refused to move, stranding him miserably and infuriatingly, exploded. "You little son of a bitch," he swore, jumping forward—and, whether Q had suddenly hit him or shot him or what,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he ended his leap on his face, sprawled unconscious along the muddy shoulder.

Q stood over him shaking his head and trembling faintly.

"It is more my fault than yours," he said aloud, to no one in particular. Then, taking a small white cardboard square from his pocket, he lettered neatly, in pencil, YOU MAY USE MY NAME. THE COAT WILL BE RECLAIMED. Bending over, he rolled McQuellen onto his back and stuck the little card in his limp hand. That was all he could do, for now. It had gone badly, worse than ever before—but not hopelessly bad. Things could still be managed so as to escape administrative notice. He tried to light a cigarette, but his hand was trembling too much. Walking slowly, heavily, he headed back. D' would be there, waiting for a report. Well, he could lie, cover it up, and right it all later. At least there was time. He wiped his forehead. There was always time: that hadn't yet been changed.

## TWO

The fog had become evening mist, grey and deep, when McQuellen came to, jumping to his feet like a man released from a spell. His clothes were covered with mud; it had caked on his hands and face. Swearing furiously he reached for his wallet. It was still there. His watch was still strapped to his wrist; all his papers, great and small, were in place.

With his handkerchief he scrubbed himself clean as best he could, rubbing savagely at the clumps of dried slime and dirt. Q's raincoat was lying in the road and as he bent to pick it up—the air was freezing cold—he saw the little neatly lettered card, dropped in his sudden awakening. He read it, cursed once more, and threw it as far as he could, watching until, whitely fluttering, it fell to the ground.

Then he started briskly walking, determined to end all the nonsense of mechanical and mental failures. Just let him get his hands on a telephone and there would be no mystery about anything.

But Q had been right: civilization was a long way off. He kept warm by moving rapidly, but he was tired and hungry. As he walked and walked without the slightest sign of life, he became almost desperate. It was fully dark now; he stumbled frequently, and kept to the road only because it was the only possible path through the thick woods that lined it on both sides. The darkness was the blackest he had ever known, unbroken by even a faint gleam. He felt that at any minute he would crash into something huge and unseen, without any con-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ceivable warning. The very air, cold and heavy with damp, had a plastic, three-dimensional quality. It was almost like the swimming one does in a nightmare, a leaden-limbed, fearful motion that exhausts but leads nowhere.

When he heard a car coming, racing down the hill and speeding along toward him, and when he turned and saw the long beam of its headlights sweeping rapidly over the road, the darkness was immediately powerless. Without any hesitation he leaped squarely into its path, waving his arms frantically. He could not afford to let civilization rush unknowingly by.

The powerful lights picked him up when the cry was still a hundred yards off: he felt the glow hit him like something warm and alive, spreading over his body and madly waving limbs. He was himself again, back in reality, where machines worked and electricity lit up the dark places of the world and where no lunatics were allowed outside of asylums. But when the car kept coming, honking its horn warningly and not slowing down, he was again afraid. What was wrong? There was no chance to decide: it was jump or be killed. For the second time in a matter of hours he went rolling in the slippery mud of the shoulder.

The car roared by without slackening speed, and was quickly gone. The darkness heaved into place behind it, filling in the thin line the headlights had cut. By the time McQuellen had regained his feet and climbed and stumbled back onto solid footing, even the distant hum of the motor was gone. There was nothing, not a sound nor a sight nor a presence. There was only blackness and cold and damp.

He tried to cheer himself up, as he plodded along. The people in the car might have been suspicious. After all, it was a lonely place. And he hardly looked respectable, in a raincoat that was a poor fit and wearing mud-splattered clothing. He had not even attempted to clean off the latest layer of dirt. It was useless. It had been a rain-filled ditch, too, and he was wet to the skin. There was nothing he could do about that either. He was too tired to do anything but pull one heavy foot after another, waiting for it all to end, as it had to, as it always did, in a successful rescue and resolution. Had he doubted that, he could not have struggled on. But these things, like the nightmares they were, always ended. When they were over it was hard to believe that they had ever actually been. That was a psychological phenomenon that had always rather amazed him, and he used it now, in anticipation, too buoy himself up.

Hours later, when another car

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

came rattling toward him, this time from the place, wherever it was, that he was trying to reach, he did not leap into the road. He stood wearily and signalled, not hoping for very much. Even civilization had its breakdowns, spots and times when only foot power and doggedness carried one through. There was enough primitive in every man for such adventures.

When the car slowed but continued past him he did not even shrug. Very well. It could not be darkness and desolation for ever. He was moving slowly, but he was moving. When he heard the sound of brakes and saw the headlights coming back, casting his shadow, huge and quavering, for fifty feet in front of him, he only stopped walking. Let it stop too, if he was to be rescued now. Otherwise he would plod on.

It did stop. Two men got out and approached him. They were wearing blue uniforms: policemen. Ah, his car had been found on the highway, and they had come to pick him up. His face brightening, he stepped forward jauntily.

It was hard to see their expressions in the backwash from the lights, but he did not think they were smiling.

"Hi," he greeted them. "Am I glad to see you fellows!"

One of them grunted. The other took McQuellen by the arm, a professional grip that was unmistakably firm. It hurt, but he winced and said nothing.

"Looks like him, don't it?" his captor asked.

The first cop grunted again.

"You try to stop a car tonight?" he was asked flatly.

McQuellen was surprised. So that was how they knew about his trouble.

"Didn't you find—" he began.

"I asked you a question," the first cop interrupted.

McQuellen swallowed his annoyance. After all, they were his rescuers.

"Yes, of course. Did you expect me to keep slogging along here all night?"

Neither cop said a word. They seemed to be waiting for him to continue, though there was nothing else to say. He grinned at them.

"Wouldn't you guys have done the same thing?"

After looking at each other briefly, they motioned him into the car. At last.

He sat in the front seat, between them. They were pretty obviously a sullen, taciturn pair; he made no attempt to carry on a conversation. He was tired, and it was more than enough to feel the smooth power of the engine rushing them along, to watch the headlights bouncing along the road in front of them, even to watch the tiny lights on the dash-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

board, illuminating gauges and dials he had never before fully appreciated.

After a time, he had no sense of how long, he became aware of dark buildings flitting by, and then street lights began to glow milkily. A town. Some windows had lights in them; neon signs flickered brightly on and off; he saw a few people moving about, their collars turned up against the cold. Civilization. He relaxed and would have gone to sleep, but the car suddenly swerved and stopped.

He opened his eyes.

"Out," one of the cops directed.

The night air made him shiver uncontrollably. It had been warm and comfortable in the patrol car. With the cops on his right and left they climbed a short flight of wide, imitation marble steps, pushed through two broad swinging doors, and were in the court house or the police station, he couldn't tell which. He hadn't spent much of his life in either.

"This way."

He was following the cops now, trailing along after their easy slouches and high, glossy boots. They paid no attention to him, plainly assuming that he was as much in tow as though he'd been chained to their belts. What if I was to cut and run, he thought with a grin? What if I were a criminal they were bringing in, and not a stranded motorist? He followed them into a room that glared with fluorescent light, up to a high desk behind which a man, not in uniform, was sitting, a magazine stuck in front of his face. What, he wondered, if their official magic didn't take? They must lose more prisoners that way.

The magazine was lowered and a plump, smooth-shaven face bent over and received the patrolmen's whispers, nodding and pursing its lips. Then the cops motioned him to step forward.

"Your name?" the personage asked.

"Peter McQuellen." The eternal red tape. He wanted nothing but the name of a good hotel—but these were the men who had brought him out of the wilderness. He would be patient.

"Occupation?"

He told them, told them everything. Finally, when they had his full pedigree, he ventured to ask if there were any more questions or whether he could be off to bed.

The personage hesitated, then smiled.

"Soon enough," he replied good-humoredly. "Soon enough. We still have a little business to transact." One of the cops grunted significantly. "I should warn you," the man behind the desk said genially, "that from here on whatever you say may be held against you."

McQuellen stared.

"I beg your pardon."

The man laughed.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"All right. I suppose you have heard that little formula before, but we have to go through it. We can't be quite as informal as we'd like, sometimes."

McQuellen blinked and said nothing.

"Now then," his questioner went on. "You didn't intend to hijack that car, did you?"

He was grinning broadly. McQuellen was indignant.

"Of course not."

The man wrote something down.

"Quite right," he observed pleasantly. "And you have a perfectly good explanation, haven't you, both for your conduct and for your presence along that lonely road?"

"You're damned right I have," McQuellen couldn't help saying.

The personage raised his eyebrows gently.

"And I think that's about enough silly questions," McQuellen went on angrily. "Damn it, I'm wet and tired."

The man rubbed his chin.

"Well then," he said blandly, "we'll see you again in the morning. Harris, will you show the gentleman to the guest suite?"

One of the cops stepped forward with a snicker, and took McQuellen by the arm in a now familiar grip. McQuellen started to wrench free, thoroughly aroused, but the big hand only clutched him harder.

"For Christ's sake," he swore. "What the hell is going on?"

"Routine, routine," the man behind the desk assured him, sticking his nose out from under his re-opened magazine.

Suddenly too tired to resist, in word or deed, McQuellen let himself be led off. He did not even protest when, after dragging him through endless dim corridors, his escort pushed open a barred door and shoved him none too gently into a cell. But when the door clanged shut and he heard a key turning he awoke.

"What the hell—" he began.

The cop turned on him.

"Shut up." He grinned. "You wanna wake up the other rats?"

McQuellen heard him pace off down the corridor, and listened while another metal door banged shut. Then he half staggered to a dirty cot that stood to one side, and stretched out. His last waking thought was disgust at the filth-streaked wall and the grimy bed clothes.

### THREE

It was worse in the daylight, which slid in from a high narrow window whose bars were just out of his reach even when he stood on tiptoe. Not that he had any ideas of escaping: the window was far too small— and there was no need for anything melodramatic. Mistakes had been made before, worse

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ones; he was still Peter McQuellen, perfectly innocent and, within reason, perfectly respectable. He tried to smile but couldn't quite manage it. He was stiff from last night's long, hard exposure; his clothes hung on him like frozen canvas, making it easier to sit and wait than to explore the dirty, almost bare cell.

It was worse because it was no longer a dream, a nightmare. Things could happen in the darkness that daylight and sunshine would never tolerate, that ought to melt as soon as tree tops and roofs began to stand out from the sky. It was worse because although he assured himself that it was all a stupid error, the circumstances of reality were crushingly plain. He'd left most off his buoyancy in the roadside mud, most of his unworried confidence had been dissolved in the freezing ditch-water.

He was not unconfident—that way lay insanity—but he was no longer unworried. That was the crux of it. The threats of darkness, like the figures of evil in an old allegory, had dared to invade the light, and he was the partly helpless victim. Damn it, but that was about the very worst. Nothing he did or said seemed to make any difference; people and things just went on in their own ways as though he were something inanimate—or at best something willless and tame, soft and yielding, a puppet, a toy. By this morning it was no longer simply infuriating: it was too omnipresent for that. For nearly a day the world had been spinning backwards, throwing him on his face every time he tried to walk normally. It was beginning, just beginning, to seem frightening.

If he was held in this one-horse jail, consistently treated like a dangerous criminal; if he couldn't talk his way to freedom; if even proof positive did him no good—these were horrible eventualities, but becoming faintly possible. And if they became actual he wasn't sure, trying to think through into the bewildering future, he wasn't at all sure that he could continue to believe in himself. Not in his personal existence; that was easily demonstrable. But in himself as Peter McQuellen, engineer, resident of New York. It would have helped had he been married. This way the most intimate proofs of himself were wholly dependent on himself—not papers, money, other men's testimony, but the intangible internal proofs whose validity only one man can test.

With an effort he forced himself to smile, forced himself to get up from the uncomfortable cot and walk around the small, dim cell. He was not exploring, nor was he exercising. He'd had more than enough of both of those the night before. He was simply asserting—exactly what he couldn't say.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He laughed at himself, mocking his vulnerability. An unpredictable breakdown in his car, a chance meeting with a lunatic, a lonely stretch of road, a scared rabbit of a motorist, and a pig-headed police force—were these sufficient, even combined with extreme physical discomfort, to rock him into muddle-headed uncertainty?

He began to make plans. His own lawyer wouldn't do for this sort of thing, he was too used to dealing with the soft palms of corporation executives. No, he'd have to phone Ghilbert, or Ransen, one of his bigger clients, men who mixed in all sorts of rough-and-tumbles. Such men wouldn't waste any time with stupidities like this. It might cost him, but it was worth it to get back quickly, to keep from having to untangle all the messy threads of this affair in a slow and painful legal see-saw.

It would be pleasant, and flattering too, if men like Ghilbert or Ransen or old Smitz took a personal interest in this weird adventure of his. He would call them first, certainly; the magic talisman of gigantic names would surely dispel the lesser magic of minor officialdom. He smiled his first spontaneous smile of the day. That would be as inevitable as—the only example that came into his head was $pi r^2$. He had heard rumors of the fall of Euclid, but was too sensible a practical scientist to treat them as more than silly fictions of adolescent and precocious minds.

"You eat," a jailer grunted, bringing him a platter and depositing it noisily just inside the cell door.

McQuellen didn't bother to say thank you. Besides, he could see what kind of food it was. But he was starving, he kept his eyes turned away, and in a matter of moments he'd swallowed it all, including the tepid coffee. There was no point to savoring what all too plainly had no savor.

Still, the meal restored his balance another notch toward complete sanity. No matter with what, his stomach was full; it was a comfortable, and eminently civilized feeling. He began to picture his conversation with Ghilbert: he'd decided to call him first of all.

He might start with a jocular reference to the laws of probability—no, that was too stiff. A casual description of the lunatic who called himself Q might begin it nicely—but too irrelevantly. He'd have to stick to the subject; Ghilbert was a busy man. Why not drop a reference to being rolled in a ditch, twice in one night. He smiled. That would surely intrigue Ghilbert, rediscover for him, vicariously and painlessly, the world of chance and accident, where lesser men than the millionaire great could still meet head-on with the unforeseen and unforeseeable.

"Magistrate's waiting," another

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

jailer announced, throwing open the cell door.

With an alert smile McQuellen stepped through; he was still smiling as he fell into line behind the jailer, following him to the place of judgment.

It was the same room, the same desk as the night before. Only the man behind it had changed. It was as though the original personage had faded, grown smaller and sallower, dropped his cheap magazine with disdainful hands, and acquired a clear sharpness of eye. This new arbiter of justice reminded McQuellen, as nothing until now had done, that it was in New England that he had lost his way; New England, home of the Puritan, the witch-burner, eater of dried fish and tough fowl, tiller of stony soil and pasturer on steep hillsides.

"We find," the magistrate began at once, in a firm sandy voice, "that the motorist who filed a complaint against you was over-zealous."

You mean scared, McQuellen silently amended. He was enjoying the sunshine now; even the magistrate's lantern jaw couldn't phase him.

"As I tried to make clear last night," he added aloud.

"But," the magistrate continued, coughing mechanically, a dry signal that he wanted silence and decorum preserved. "But, in order to avoid a number of additional charges which the county might make against you, we request that you explain, as briefly and succinctly as possible, exactly what you were doing, and why, on Route 73-a, in so disorderly a state, and at such a late hour."

McQuellen nodded amiably.

"May I first make one inquiry and one phone call?" he asked politely.

"Certainly."

"What about my car?"

The magistrate shook his head strongly.

"You were on foot, Mr. McQuellen."

The formal address was heartening.

"Only because," he explained, "my car had some sort of mechanical failure." He described the car and the location as well as he could. A policeman was sent to check.

"And my phone call?" McQuellen insisted gently, as the magistrate gave signs of continuing the hearing. With some ceremony he was led to the nearest pay phone. He fished out a handful of change, a simple act that seemed to impress his escorting cop, and dialed the long distance operator. While waiting for the call to be put through, he tried to chit-chat with the stolidly neutral-faced policeman, who did his duty carefully, watching the suspect's every move. He was rather ridiculous, standing very still and rotating his eyes as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

McQuellen's finger spun around the dial.

"I won't be bothering you much longer, I'm afraid," McQuellen smiled.

"No bother," the cop said flatly.

"Though I have been in more comfortable jails," McQuellen went on easily. The cop did not react. "Now the time they had me up for arson, or even the one time when—"

His call came through and he gave up on the policeman. What the hell: all men were equal, all right, but some men were just more equal than others.

He asked for Mr. Ghilbert, his voice authoritative, and the secretary at the other end obliged.

"Ghilbert."

It was the great man himself.

"Hello, this is Peter McQuellen. And I'll bet—"

"Don't be silly," Ghilbert barked, and hung up. McQuellen slowly put the receiver back on its hook. There was a pause, a click, and then the rattle of his change dropping into the slot. He wet his lips with his tongue and did not look around.

"You through?" the cop demanded.

"No." McQuellen tried to answer nonchalantly. "The operator gave me a wrong number." He fished out some more change. "I'll just try it again." He did not understand, but neither did he have the time to try. He gave old Smitz's number, and waited silently, not looking at his guard, who seemed, suddenly, much more guard-like. McQuellen no longer wanted to joke with him, or pretend a vast and spurious criminality.

He put up a brave front and had his call switched to Smitz's private office without any trouble. While the old man's outer-office clerk buzzed the inner sanctum, McQuellen held the phone as tightly as he could, squeezing the black plastic until his finger tips went white and yellow. It was better than letting his hands tremble.

"Hello."

McQuellen steadied his voice.

"Mr. Smitz?"

The old man was patient and calm, as ever.

"Yes. What can I do for you?"

McQuellen plunged.

"This is the man who did the last set of plans for you, Peter McQuellen." There was a dull silence. "I've—that is, I'm—"

Smitz interrupted.

"Young man, I'm old, but not yet a fool. I'm sorry."

McQuellen sat for a good half minute after the phone clicked dead, staring numbly at nothing in particular. Nothing was incredible any more; everything had quietly, without warning, relapsed back. It was today, but he was back in last night. He was lost.

He took heart a bit while telling his story to the magistrate, who

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

listened attentively. It was good to be taken seriously, even by someone who heard with suspicious ears. At the mention of Q, the man behind the high desk made his only interruption.

"Q, you say?" He rubbed his chin vigorously.

McQuellen explained that it was the only name he'd been given, the magistrate nodded, again impassive, and the story was concluded.

"And that's all there is to it," McQuellen wound up—carefully omitting the inexplicable phone calls.

"Yes." The magistrate wrote something, then spoke without looking up: "I trust your lawyer will arrive soon."

McQuellen hesitated.

"I didn't phone my lawyer," he answered evasively, then added, in an attempt to recoup his position: "I didn't think I needed one."

His erstwhile guard and escort sidled up to the desk and whispered something. The magistrate nodded briefly and the guard resumed his post, staring blankly at the grey, dusty floor. McQuellen thought he knew what had been said. Damn.

Another policeman was called up to the desk and given an order; it was not whispered, but McQuellen couldn't make out what was said. Something about calling—he'd missed the name. Was this for him, for his case? He watched the cop treading respectfully out of the room. He was entirely passive; whatever happened would happen independently of him, whether he chose it to happen or whether he didn't.

"Mr. McQuellen," the magistrate declared preliminarily.

"Yes sir." McQuellen stood straight.

"We'll have to remand you to your cell for the time being."

"But" — McQuellen protested ineffectually, then gave up. What was the use? Thy will be done, a detached part of his brain muttered dryly.

"We hope, however," the magistrate added tersely, "to conclude your matter early this afternoon."

"Thank you," McQuellen said vacuously as he was led out. Safely locked in his cell, he clenched his fist—and unclenched it. There was nothing to hit, except himself. He remembered his idiotic thank you of the moment before and shuddered. What was happening to him? Why hadn't he spoken up? The questions were perfectly idle. Although he knew no answers, he knew enough. Too much, perhaps, to wait quietly or resignedly for whatever disposition the early afternoon would make of him.

The time went slowly. There was nothing to do, nothing he wanted to do. He did not think or plan, as he'd done before his second hearing. He did not read, or ask for a deck of cards, or a beer,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

or any entertainment to smooth over the dragging hours. He watched the sun creeping across the floor of his cell, until it disappeared, a third of the way up the opposite wall. Something had blocked it off, as it rose higher in the sky.

Then there was nothing to watch, just as there was nothing to do, nothing to think about. There was only himself—and his earlier fear was becoming stronger. Was he nothing, too, only himself and not a bit more than that? What good was a self, a detached, independent, unconnected self?

They brought him another meal which went the way of the first. He remembered, when the jailer had gone, that it had been a long time since he'd smoked. He had money: why not ask for a pack of cigarettes? But he hadn't, and when the man returned to claim the empty dishes McQuellen was occupied, bent over and silently grappling with nothingness. It sucked him in, like a swiftly turning whirlpool, one with no source and no outlet, spinning without a bubble or a splash, winding around itself with an insidiously rapid and consistent flow. He kept his eyes closed, to concentrate on it better—to combat it more readily, he told himself. But all his grappling was the impotent shaking of a withered leaf, caught in the wind and dancing for its life.

Just before he was brought back into the courtroom he pushed himself into the open, made himself look around, consider, evaluate. For the first time he eyed the high, narrow slit that was his window with the thought of escape, but it was as useless a glance as ever. Still, it was food, however stupidly, for actual thought; it reawakened his mind, and his sense of reality, both suspended in the face of a nightmare of irrationality.

He studied his clothes, mud-caked and unkempt. That must be a part of it. He considered Q's raincoat, tried it on, noticed the poor fit. But it was clean. Did they think he had stolen it? Perhaps he ought to leave it behind, when he when—he left here, whenever that was to be, and whenever he was to proceed. He did not consider those possibilities. But he took out his wallet and counted his money, he examined his personal papers, saw the name—Peter McQuellen, sure enough and the information enscribed on them, and duly considered their worth to him. He rubbed his finger across his stubble that was sprouting on his chin, ran his hands through his wild, encrusted hair, and considered them, too. Finally, seconds before they came to fetch him, he walked into the far corner, where the uncovered bowl squatted, and urinated loudly. By God, he was still human. He was still at it when they entered his cell. He looked around when they laughed.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"C'mon," a cop chuckled. "You can't keep the law waiting for that."

"Some other time," his fellow added. "It'll keep."

McQuellen paid no attention, finishing with indifferent dignity. It was a highly symbolic act, it seemed to him; he would not be interrupted.

"Ready?" he was asked with amused patience.

He did not deign to answer, but, holding his head straight and erect, walked out between them. He had a feeling, a faint start of prophetic insight, that he was leaving this cell, this jail, for good. No matter where he went from here, it would be good to be gone.

The magistrate was the same, but a new figure had been added, a man as tall as himself, but heavier, rounder, his dark face trimmed above in a crew cut, below in a square moustache. His business suit was expensive; there was something peculiarly professional about it and about him, something cool, accomplished, deft and conceited. McQuellen had seen the look before; at times he'd worn it himself, for a new client or a promising old one.

The newcomer nodded to him as he walked in. McQuellen only glanced back, then turned his attention to the magistrate, who was unexpectedly grim, even frowning. It was hard to tell.

"Yes, yes," the newcomer proclaimed crisply, throwing back his shoulders with a considered air.

The magistrate nodded firmly.

"I thought so. Now," he said sternly, "this has got to stop."

The stocky man shrugged.

"My dear sir," he answered, spreading out his hands palm upward. It was a curiously inappropriate gesture.

The magistrate recognized it wearily, then turned to McQuellen.

"Do you know this man?" he inquired pointedly.

McQuellen looked again.

"Not from a hole in the wall." He felt oddly detached, indifferent; all this was folderol; it signified nothing. Nothing signified anything.

"Are you sure?" the magistrate persisted.

Something in his voice made McQuellen get a brief grip on himself. Perhaps this did mean something, somehow.

"No," he repeated. "Never saw him before."

The magistrate sighed.

"As usual," he conceded.

The newcomer nodded briskly.

"Of course. Shall I—?"

The magistrate seemed to understand perfectly.

"Yes, doctor, take him away."

The heavy-set man made a quiet motion to several men behind him, and stepped over to McQuellen.

"Will you come with me?" he

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

asked graciously. His manner was a shade too florid; McQuellen was not pleased with him.

"Why?"

The other pursed his lips.

"To get away from here?"

McQuellen considered.

"No," he said at last.

The doctor stepped back, and three more newcomers came toward McQuellen. Suddenly remembering, he turned to the magistrate.

"What about my car?" he cried. He backed up as the three men approached him, their purpose unmistakable. "What about my car?"

"A car was found," the answer came. "It was claimed by a resident of New Parkersburg, on unimpeachable evidence. He has it now."

The three men started walking toward him again. McQuellen backed up; he was almost to the wall.

"By God," he cried, very nearly in tears, "that's impossible. Impossible."

The magistrate said nothing. The men were almost on him. He turned and made a sudden dive for a large half-open window, but they had him before he'd reached it. He struggled, cursing with a frenzy that was near insanity. With experienced motions they pushed him to the floor, where two held him briefly immobile and the third gave him a needle in the arm. Then they carried him, still struggling fiercely, over to the door and out of the room.

The doctor lingered a moment.

"The sedative will help him soon," he informed the magistrate soothingly, seeing his troubled look.

"It's a melancholy business," the other replied, his disapproval held down. "Let's have no more of it, doctor."

Again the doctor shrugged.

"Why are they always so violent?" the magistrate wondered aloud, half to himself.

"If I knew" the doctor smiled, then bowed himself out.

"A bad business," the magistrate muttered. "Bad." Then: "All right, Cassidy. Bring in your man." He cleared his throat briefly and turned his attention to the next case.

## FOUR

It was not like waking from a spell, this time. He did not jump up, fully awake in a matter of seconds. He circled up, spiraling around and around through endless fuzzy layers of perception, drifting toward a surface he could dimly see and even more dimly understand.

There was light, first of all. Then a wall, smooth and high and curiously shifting: he was not at all sure it was a wall and not a ceiling or a floor. But it settled into place, finally, and he could see, as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he began to revolve his eyes, that it was attached to something else that was plainly a ceiling.

A wall and a ceiling. A room, a house. He was in a house. Civilization. He wasn't walking on the dark road anymore. The layers began to fall away faster. The episode in the police station, in the courtroom, flickered swiftly by. He had left there. He was someplace else. He tried to turn his head too, to enlarge the arc his eyes could follow, but the faint motion made him reel in a wave of nausea. His eyes screwed tightly closed and he lay very still, sweating, his hands clenched, not thinking anything while the pain lingered.

Then he slowly opened his eyes again. He must be sick, this must be a hospital. Hadn't the dark, heavy-set man been a doctor? The magistrate had said so. The men who had grabbed at him. He remembered a struggle. They must have beaten him. He had been found and brought here. He sighed, relieved. He was safe. At last.

The nausea faded gradually away, and he could turn his head without more than a throbbing ache. He surveyed the room. It was small, very white and very bare. He blinked. The window was high, higher even than in the jail cell. It was barred. The door. It had only a peephole, at the top, and that too was barred. He lay still a moment, fear and suspicion ripping at him once more. This could not be a hospital. Unless they were afraid that he was a violent case. Was he? Was he a violent case?

He sat up quickly, ignoring the wrench in his throbbing forehead. He was Peter McQuellen. Christ, what was going on. He looked down at himself, and saw that, under the hospital-type sheet, he was stark naked. He could see no clothes about the room, and no place where clothes might be put. There was no furniture, nothing. Even the mattress-pallet he was lying on was hardly furniture: it lay directly on the floor.

He stood up, staggered, then caught at the shining wall and steadied himself. The smooth paint slid from under his fingers like polished glass. Then he bent over and tried to lift the mattress. He wasn't sure why, but he tried. It was tied down, cemented down; he couldn't budge it. Yet this wasn't a padded cell. The bare white walls were hard. Then he wasn't a violent case—he hesitated, vaguely aware that his standard of reference was no longer internal, was no longer himself but what was happening to him. He was only, now, what happened to him. But he couldn't be bothered with such thoughts. He walked, reeling slightly, to the door.

The peephole was high, but by standing on tiptoe he could just bring his eye to the bottom of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ring. He squinted, to get a better glimpse of whatever was outside—and then he froze. There was only another eye, staring fixedly in at him. It was his own eye, seen in the tiny mirror, but he was too startled to understand that.

He dropped to the ground, trembling. He was being watched, watched all the time, day and night. It was insanity, and he must belong in it. He had had a breakdown: that was the answer. Too much work. A terrible strain. But he'd just been on a vacation, hadn't he? The floor too was even and smooth. He stretched out on it and pressed his hot cheeks on the cool flat surface. He was being watched: he'd have to be very careful. He crept over to the mattress and crawled onto it, pulling the sheet over him like a tent. He couldn't be seen, in here. They might watch as much as they wanted, but they would see nothing.

Yet he did not feel safe. It was too poor a hiding place. His legs were trembling and he leaned over and hugged them with his arms. It was a little better that way, curled around himself. His head on his knees, feeling a little protected by the sheet draped over him, he stared at nothingness and waited. His mind went on working aimlessly, like an idling motor, but it went noplace, only turning over, in brief snatches, unconnected events and people. It was a half-sleep, a day-dream of indefinite duration.

Until, before he knew how it had come about, the sheet was pulled away from him and the cell was full of people. Like the walls, they wore white. They were huge, towering over him—but no, it was just that they were standing and he was not. It was nice to realize so important a fact. He started to stand up too, to face them on equal terms. Hands reached out and pressed him back down. He did not feel strong enough to resist, so he slid and pulled himself against the wall and sat looking up at them. What had they come for?

There were not so many of them, after all. He scanned them carefully, paying no attention to their return stares. None was familiar. He especially watched for the dark, moustached face, but it was not there. These were unsmiling, unsympathetic, cool and observant faces. He did not like them, and was sure that they did not like him. But they were in charge, and he would be very patient. He waited.

It took a long time. They stood, towering immobilely over him, grilling him without a word, examining him without a gesture. It was hard, after a little, to keep facing those impersonal eyes. He took to glancing from one to the other, but that only helped for a while. When he looked away, though, it was worse. Then he be-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

came conscious of himself, naked and impotent; then he became even more conscious of the staring eyes. Not meeting them was worse than keeping up the pose of give and take.

But it kept getting harder and harder to raise his eyes to theirs, and more and more frightening not to watch them, not to know what they were up to. He became restless; once he found himself, without the slightest volition, crying, and forced himself to stop. It was difficult, but he managed. Yet they would not stop. They stood and stared, and he was finally beaten down. He closed his eyes. He could take no more. Let them do what they would.

They were still in no hurry. He trembled apprehensively, knowing how entirely he was at their mercy: he had not even a rag of clothing with which to protect himself. They could do anything to him. Anything. But he could not open his eyes again. He could not. He tensed his nervous muscles, he cringed against the wall, waiting. He was nothing, and they were everything. If that was the lesson, he had learned it by heart.

"You," a flat voice called.

He did nothing, made no response. Something hard crashed into his stomach, doubling him over in breathless agony. His eyes had been knocked open. Choking, gasping, he looked up.

"You," the flat voice repeated. They were all there, watching. Then one of them bent over and slowly, deliberately, showing him with clear signs exactly what he was going to do, made a fist and slammed it into his face. It knocked him sprawling onto the floor, dazing him. There was blood in his mouth. And they were gone.

He lay there, where the last blow had left him, with the pain and the humiliation bounding and rebounding from the smooth, shining walls. The room was a vast echo of shrieking wounds. And when the pain had ebbed enough for partial consciousness to return, he wept. It was an absolute, motionless, unaware weeping; the tears might have been coming from every pore in his body. It lasted for hours, diminishing into low sobbing and not quite stopping even after he was released into sleep.

The door was almost noiseless, but he awoke at the first stirring. It was nearly dark in the room, but he did not feel sheltered by it. He crept frantically into the far corner, cringing down. There was a short scraping noise, and then the door was closed.

He wasn't sure that he was still alone, but when a quarter of an hour passed he ventured to explore, moving timidly and slowly, groping cautiously with his hands. There was no point to exposing himself more than was necessary; crawling was actually more effi-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cient; and so he did not stand up but moved on all fours, creeping like a caged animal whose captors have beaten it into submission. By now it was quite dark; visibility was about nil.

He became motionless as soon as he'd touched it. He was only half afraid, but it was enough to keep him silent and still. What had they put in with him? It was cool and hard, and it had moved a bit when he'd pushed unknowingly against it. Something metallic and heavy. What was it designed to do to him? He crouched and tried to decide. The temptation was to ignore it, to crawl back away from it as far as he could get, and if possible, to ignore it. But would it let him? Would it ignore him? He could not help himself: he had to know.

Gingerly he reached it. It was where he had touched it last, as blunt and hard to his quivering finger tips as the first time. He tried to measure its size, and was mildly relieved to find it not very large. He found it had wheels, too, great broad things, ridiculously ponderous for a thing—whatever it was—so small.

His courage mounting, he slowly ran his hand over the top edge. It had moved only a short distance when there was a sharp drop—and then he pulled back. His fingers were wet. Suppose this was a pan filled with acid, with some vicious chemical? He held the soiled hand as far from the rest of him as he could, praying that nothing disastrous had occurred. If he'd only had a bit of cloth to wipe it clean. The sheet. He started to wheel about, then stopped. He had to sleep with that. But which was more important? Would they be angry if he soiled their bedding?

It was an issue settled by time. His fingers continued to feel normal, and only harmlessly wet. Perhaps this was nothing dangerous. He carefully pulled the exposed hand toward him, sniffing furiously. The smell was neutral, vaguely familiar. He had no fearful associations with it. His hand was quite close, now. He hesitated, then suddenly, daringly, put it to his lips and licked a bit off.

Oatmeal. It was oatmeal. He smiled at himself. Oatmeal. Well, they were going to feed him. He began to grope about for a spoon. But suppose it were drugged? It did not faze him: what could he do about it if it were? They could drug him quite as easily in a hundred other ways. It was a chance he could not avoid taking. And since he had tasted the familiar mealiness his stomach had been rumbling painfully. He was hungry. Where was that damned spoon? He fished about and around, but found nothing. There was no spoon.

For a moment he drew back, squatting like a naked primitive. It was not hard to see what they were

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

doing. It all fitted. Well, he could not help himself one bit. Men had eaten with their hands before. He dipped in, brought the stuff to his mouth, swallowed. It was flat, but satisfying, even though the taste had obviously been calculated to be as neutral as possible.

His hands began to get sticky, gummy; he grew annoyed, impatient. By God, there were better ways. He tried to lift the travelling bowl, but it was far too heavy. Nor could he tip it. With an angry shake of his head he bent down and, taking a deep breath, plunged in his face. That was better, much better. He drained the whole contents, licking up the last stray morsels. Then he crawled into his corner and slept again. There was nothing else to do.

There was nothing at all to do. He could wait for his food, which came once a day. It was never enough to last him very long, and so he was always hungry long before the next day's portion arrived. He could wait for the white-clad men who'd beaten him the first day. He expected them momentarily, his pulse clanging at the thought. But they did not come. He was left absolutely alone, with nothing to do but hope that they—whoever they were and whatever they wanted—would not be too merciless. He was alone with a firm, ever-waxing conviction of degradation and futility. Was he still, after several days of this, Peter McQuellen? Was he any one, anything?

He crouched in the corner of his small room and did not move for hours at a time. Why get up? Why walk about? He did not even bother to think, or to day-dream. Everything was a blankness, a dull vacuity in which he hung and which incorporated him wholly.

On the fourth day, somehow jarred from its apathy, his mind functioned long enough for him to think of suicide. Why not? It was almost a gay thought. He could end all this horror in a moment—and why should he be the instrument which prolonged his own agony? It would be a short drop, from this into death: it was not like killing a living man. But the bars of the slitted window were too high, those of the panel in the door too low. He had no knife, there were no rough edges on which to lacerate his veins. He had a sheet: he could garrot himself. Or he could use his bare hands. But he could not.

Had it been just a little easier, he would have roused himself and done it. But it was too hard, and he simply lay where he was and forgot about it. He lay still and forgot about everything. That was the only way. He did not remember Q's advice, but he followed it nevertheless. He left everything behind, for nothing belonged to him any more. It was his lesson, and he had learned it.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

On the fifth day he had another visit, this time from one man alone, a tall, heavy, moustached man who sauntered in and stood over him, a knowing smile curled around his moist lips. He knew the man, but it was hard to concentrate on such things. He contemplated the dark, fleshy face. It had smiled at him once before. He did not like it. Who? It came to him slowly, while the face waited, amused and mockingly tolerant. The doctor.

"And do you know me this time?" his visitor asked, seeing the flicker of recognition.

He said nothing.

The doctor calmly kicked him in the ribs, still smiling.

"Do you know me?" the question came again.

McQuellen flinched back but said nothing. Then the doctor, his smile broadening, took out a shiny little scalpel and started to bend over, deliberately, consideringly, and McQuellen hurriedly spoke.

"Yes," he whispered, shuddering, his eyes fixed on the bright blade in the doctor's hand.

The doctor laughed.

"Good. In which case I pronounce you cured. You'll be released tomorrow."

McQuellen lay very still. The scalpel was still out, and he was watching it intently.

"Do you hear me?" the doctor questioned, his voice calm and equable.

McQuellen could understand nothing but the threat of that tiny blade, but he managed to answer that he had heard.

"And do you understand?"

McQuellen wrenched his eyes from the scalpel. What did the man want from him?

"You will be released tomorrow," the doctor repeated slowly. "Is that perfectly clear?"

McQuellen nodded. What was happening now?

"Unless, of course," the doctor laughed, "you'd prefer to stay with us a while longer." He kicked McQuellen again, out of sheer good humor. "We may not treat you sumptuously, but we do keep you alive. Or didn't old Q tell you about that?"

He seemed to expect an answer.

"No." McQuellen was not startled at the sudden entry of Q's name. He could not be startled by anything, now.

The doctor stared down at him fondly.

"You know, I'm rather proud of you." He crossed his arms thoughtfully on his well-tailored chest. "The first departure from the old method; a training period completely designed by me; and you're an amazing success. Amazing." He shook his head, incredulously delighted with himself. "No thanks to old Q, of course. But we can do better than that in the future. Amazing." Again he shook his head. "What a demonstration."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

McQuellen, no longer able to see the scalpel, was partly conscious of what was being said. It made no sense to him, but he listened, waiting for the periodic threat, the inevitable kick or blow. He was the ideal captive audience, helpless, horizontal, cowed, unable to answer or to understand. And the doctor knew it.

"You really can't appreciate yourself," he continued. "Or what you mean. This is a historical turning point, and it pivots on you." He was carried away for a moment. "Think of it: five days, or a week at most, when by the older, obsolete techniques it took at least a month, sometimes four or five. Consider the astounding efficiency —and what a productive ratio we'll be able to maintain! The whole transition period will be shortened by years. The whole transition period," he repeated, rocking gently on his spread-apart feet. "The whole transition period," he said once more, and the phrase somehow stuck in McQuellen's head, whirling about in there long after the doctor had gone. The professional smile staring down at him could not have been smugger.

"Tomorrow," he said briefly. "Ah, but it will be good to be free again, won't it?" With which geniality he left.

The doctor was a white-collar worker: his kicks did not have the staying power of the men on his staff. It was not to be expected. They were professionals at their trade, he at his. Accordingly, the pain he'd left with McQuellen was only a mild thing, and it left him free to try to remember, to try to think.

The chief echo in his head was the meaningless phrase the doctor had used so frequently. The whole transition period. What whole. What transition. What period. They were not questions so much as propositions. He subdivided them mechanically. Transition period. Transition period whose. Period transition. Whole period transition. Whole. Period. Transition. The words had no significance, no matter how he rearranged and shuffled them. But he felt their importance, something in his shell-shocked brain held onto them as slippery, incomprehensible counters, talismans he might someday need as current coin.

The other words he could not remember so exactly. Tomorrow was a part of it. Tomorrow meant some other time: he knew that. They were going to do something else to him, something new. They pretended—he had caught that—that he would enjoy this something, but they knew better and he did too. Was he going to leave here? The idea meant little to him: he did not know where he was or where he might be going. One place was like all other places. But hadn't there been better places, once? He had forgotten. He did

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

not try very hard to remember.

He sat in his corner, not crouching now, absorbedly trying to untangle the disorder inside him. His sheet, no longer quite so white, was in front of him: it helped to smooth out its wrinkles, patting it soft and pliable. His hands moved deliberately, his brain scarcely at all. He had forgotten too much, and this was no place to remember. This was no place. He was—he did not know.

He stopped smoothing out the sheet. What was the use? His stiffened back drooped and he slid into his usual crouching posture. He had to wait. Waiting meant the only knowing left to him. It was not too bad, when they left him alone. If they left him alone. And he remembered what he'd most wanted to forget, the men in white. He was afraid again.

He stayed afraid until they came for him the next day. He was so afraid that he failed to notice the omission of his usual feeding. He was not aware of hunger, but only of fear. And when the men finally came into his cell, white-clad and silent, he grovelled and whined.

But they only picked him up, one man to a limb, like men stacking bags of sand, and carried him out. No one paid any other attention to him, no one beat him. But he was still too abjectly scared to notice how well-treated he was. To notice what they carried him through was completely beyond him: he was not even aware of colors or general forms, because his eyes were screwed shut. He did not want to see. It was better to be blind until they forced you to see.

He was thrown roughly to the ground. It was rocky, there was a clump or two of grass. But he did not notice that until later, until they had gone. Someone threw something across him. Later he saw that it was the raincoat Q had given him, and that aside from that he had no clothing, nothing. But now he lay where they had dropped him, silent, motionless. They departed silently, as they had come.

He lay there, terror-stricken. What was happening? How were they going to torture him this time? But the silence was too pervasive. They had left him, he was alone, and nothing was happening to him. It was impossible. He lay still a while longer. Nothing happened. Slowly, his hands trembling, he pulled a corner away from the coat lying on his head and back, and looked cautiously out.

The sun was shining, he saw trees in the distance, and in front of him only rocks, occasional bits of green that he recognized as grass—and nothing else. No men in white uniforms. No one. It was a trick, yet he was alone. Free. What did that mean, free? He had forgotten.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He pulled in his legs, got onto his hands and knees. It was difficult, because his arms and legs were shaking and weak. He felt sick and exhausted. But he got to his feet, finally, and stood, as he immediately saw, on the slope of a hill. He was naked, on the slope of a hill.

There was nothing human in sight, no people, no buildings, no roads or smoke—there was not even an animal. He looked at the sun. It seemed real. He glanced down at the ground, which also seemed genuine. He saw Q's raincoat, bent to pick it up and lost his balance and fell. He fell on his side and stayed there, too weak to move, and conscious of a peculiar sensation in his sides and belly. They were quivering, quaking. He did not know it, but he was laughing hysterically.


## *How to save a minute a month . . .*

**More and more readers are saving valuable moments these days —because they have already subscribed to F&SF. They save an average of one minute a month by realizing that there is no point in *their* reading a paragraph sitting on top of a subscription coupon—they *know* the advantages of having F&SF delivered to their door. Of course, they also save those minutes they would otherwise devote to stopping off at their newsstand every month . . . as well as saving a little money—it's cheaper to have F&SF delivered regularly than it is to go out and buy it. (Incidentally, if you wish to preserve this issue intact, don't cut out the coupon below; just send along on a separate sheet of paper the information the coupon requests—the service you receive will be just as prompt.)**

Mercury Press, Inc., 527 Madison Avenue, New York 22, N. Y. F9

Send me The Magazine Of FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION for one year for $4.50.

☐ I enclose $4.50 ☐ Bill me

Name.....

Address.....

City.....Zone.....State.....


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

*Craigo hadn't handled a space freighter in years, but he knew there was nothing to it. Just push a couple of buttons at the right time, and he'd be home free . . . barring emergencies . . .*

# BUTTON, BUTTON

*by Gordon R. Dickson*

THE MUSIC BLARED. THE PHOBOS night club chorus line advanced, female bodies shapely under an artificial one-half gravity, brilliantly dancing. They attracted male gazes among the tourists all around the room; but they did not attract the Assistant Engineer.

"Goddam button-pusher!" glowered the AE. He was staring across at the bar, where stood a ship's First Officer of his own youthful age—but tall, polished and handsome in dress whites and with the fine manners of a graduate from a private academy. The AE was short, sandy-haired, mastiff-tempered, and lapsed into the slum argot of Greater Chicago, Earth, under the influence of stress or alcohol. And he had been drinking double champagne cocktails for the last two hours—ever since finishing up the very dirty job of checking over the converter, on orders from the captain delivered by that same First Officer, as he left ship on his own port leave, some eight hours earlier.

"Listen," said the Chief Engineer, "don't sneer at button-pushers."

"No?" said the Assistant, swinging around with half-drunk belligerence before he remembered who it was he was talking to.

"No," said the Chief.

"Anybody can push a button."

"You think so?" said the Chief. He pointed across the room. "Look at those two over there."

The Assistant looked. At a small table for two, he saw a gross, hog-faced man well into middle age, and a woman verging on it, but yet startlingly beautiful with the sharp, thin beauty of a high-fashion model in a woman's magazine ad. The man was eating something elaborate with gusto; the woman, sipping an emerald drink in a fragile cocktail



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

glass. They looked as badly matched as swine and pearls.

"I see them," growled the assistant. "They're no button-pushers, either one of them."

"That's the point," said the Chief. "Let me tell you about those two."

The hog-faced man [said the chief] is named Craigo DelMyer. He is also from Chicago. He came up the hard way as an odd-job business representative, got in with the labor and guild organizations, and ended up as top man for the Interplanetary Freight Handlers' Union. Which as everybody knows, is no small pickings.

However, it took him nearly twenty years to get there. He had been a pretty rough customer to start off with, and he ended up like a bear on top of the mountain —in fine position, but hardly the sort of character anyone could love. The only trouble was that, like the bear, he had no place else to go from where he was, but down.

He tried not to think about this. When he did, he was liable to smoke too many cigars, or drink too many martinis; and then his indigestion would start in on him again.

However, for years he was not threatened. Things went normally until about six years ago, when there was that sudden surge of government investigations. One of the organizations that came under the glare of the investigating committees spotlights was the Interplanetary Freight Handlers Union. And Craigo sweated.

The queries flew thick and fast. Craigo woke up nights, parrying questions in his sleep. The Committee was on his tail. The press was on his tail. His old enemies among management were out to nail him while opportunity offered. And then, somewhere along the line, they all three got together. What came out of their collaboration was a question put to Craigo in a press conference.

"—and do you hold a union card yourself, Mr. DelMyer?" asked a reporter.

Craigo laughed like the jolly man he was on these occasions.

"A union card? You're asking me—" Laughter made him quiver all over like a well-dressed blanc mange. "Had one nineteen years, guy, that's all!"

"Would you say that present union members work as hard for their pay as they did in your day, Mr. DelMyer? The work was more physical then, I understand?"

"Not a bit! Same thing. Different ships, same duties!"

"Enough the same, would you say, so that you, yourself could take charge of a ship on a regular run right now, if you had to validate your card?"

Craigo saw the trap then; but

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he saw it the same way a packing-house-bound steer sees the chute to the killing room.

"Well now—" he chortled. "Well, now, I'm not just as young as I was once, guy. Twenty years —"

"But assuming your health was—"

When cornered, Craigo, for all his other sins, was not one to turn belly-up and beg for mercy.

"Assuming my health's still good!" he interrupted, bringing his thick fist down with a crash on a handy table, "I'll buck a freight to anywhere in the Solar System, guy. And you can tell'm I said so!"

But he lost no time in terminating the interview. And the minute he was alone in his hotel suite, he put in a furious call to the head of the Union's legal department.

"Get me a doc says I can't lift a freight two inches!" he yelled into the phone. And then sat back to gnaw a cigar. The legal head obliged; but by the time the doctor arrived, Craigo had heard the evening news on his wall screen, and recognized the inevitable. He sent the doctor back to his office.

The Committee, officially informed of the interview, had announced that Mr. DelMyer's statement was very interesting. It might, said a committee spokesman, tend to show whether he was an honest working member merely representing his fellows—or a slick opportunist, living high off the fat of the men who really did the work. If Mr. DelMyer meant what he said. . . .

A hundred years before, Craigo would have had his doctor's prohibition and a rigged vote of confidence to shut up the squawkers. But nowadays the voting was government-supervised.

Craigo spat out his chewed cigar butt, faced up to the situation as he had faced up to many since he had first opened his eyes under Chicago's looming skyline—and left for Earth Outer Station Number Five, while the commentators were still wondering whether he would go through with it.

At the station, they picked him the easiest immediately available run—a medical supplies shipment to Venus Orbital Dockage; and a sharp young union member took him out to look over the ship he would be handling. A freight ship, as anyone in the business knows, is nothing much more than a tin can full of goods, with a thrust unit forty meters off at the end of a steel rod. In the tin can part are a control panel, living space for a single crewman, and the freight. Craigo, once he was in the ship, stared rather closely at the control panel. Things *had* changed a bit, in the last twenty years.

"Don't let it bother you," the sharp young union member reas-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sured him. "The minute they give you a green light, punch for start. Six days out, punch for turnover. Eight days after that, punch for park. The computer'll do it all but park—Venus Orbital Dockage'll take care of that."

"WhaddaIdoincaseofanemergency?" demanded Craigo, around his cigar.

"Forget it. There aren't any emergencies, nowdays. Just push the start button when they give you the green—"

"What," repeated Craigo, taking the cigar out of his mouth and speaking more distinctly, "do I do in case of an emergency?"

"But there aren't—" began the young man; and stopped on suddenly finding Craigo's boar-like features uncomfortably close to his own. He gulped, and started to explain. Half an hour later, Craigo interrupted him with an upraised hand.

"All right, arright!" said Craigo. "Let's make it simple, hey? Let's get down to the important parts. This here button takes it off the computer and puts it on manual. Right?"

"Right—"

"And this here lever lets me unlock the regular manual controls. I know how t'use *them!*"

"Yes, sir."

"The buttons for the gyros, here. The picture model shows my inclination to line of course. Ship-to-station phone controls, here. Ship-to-ship, here. Computer logs and allows for change of course. It controls here. Punch this if I want back on course—"

"Well, yes, but—"

"Don't give me no more buts. I got your buts and excepts and only-ifs up to here. What I wanted to know was what do I do in case of an emergency. All right. I know."

When it was time to leave, he left. He did not curse his fate as he went; but its touch was heavy as the incipient indigestion on his stomach. At that, he should have been more chary of letting his resentment ride him.

For Fate had barely started with him.

At the moment Craigo was taking his seat before the controls of his ship, a certain well-known but temperamental opera star was giving her steward final directions for a buffet lunch to be served aboard her private ship (*yacht* was a word rather sneered at in spacing circle) as soon as they were underway from Venus Orbital to Earth Station.

". . . and salmon mayonnaise," she was saying. "I can't stand the stuff myself, but the Senator wants it. And so we'll give it to him." She fixed the steward with a green and glittering, if beautiful, eye. "Won't we?"

"Well, ma'm—I haven't checked the stores; but I think—"

"You think? Don't you know?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I pay you to know. I pay you very well to know, I believe!"

"Yes, ma'm."

"Salmon mayonnaise, then."

"Yes, ma'm."

"And right next to the salmon mayonnaise, on it's right . . .

Meanwhile, Craigo was watching the traffic light on his panel. It blinked on, suddenly green. He punched the start button, got up, lit himself a fresh cigar and began to mix himself a martini. . . .

One day went by. Craigo's ship, computer-run, burned its way through the hollowness of space on a conventional course.

Two days went by. Craigo began playing solitaire. Because he cheated, he invariably won. When he won, he bought himself a drink.

Five days out. Craigo gave up cheating.

Six days out. Craigo punched the turnover button and had another drink.

Eight days out. Craigo, who was sleeping off a middling-to-heavy hangover, was suddenly blasted out of sleep and bunk alike by the clamoring of an alarm bell that nearly deafened him. He rose and blundered his way to the panel and finally shut off the alarm by keying in the ship-to-ship phone to which it belonged.

Blessed silence suddenly filled the freight ship. But hard on the heels of it, a female human voice blasted out of an overhead speaker.

"Answer me! Answer me—I know you're there. I can see by the light on the dingus you're in range. Oh, come in, come in—whatever they say—Mayday! S.O.S.! *Help!*"

The final word burst from the speaker with all the range, power, distinction and point of a fine lyric soprano.

Meanwhile, Craigo, half-hungover, half-asleep, bleary-eyed, cotton-fingered and cursing, had been simultaneously trying to find the talk button on the ship-to-ship phone and the volume control that would allow him to tone down this blasting banshee of a woman. As luck would have it, he succeeded in doing both at once; so that the voice from the speaker suddenly faded away to a whisper, and then abruptly cut off altogether, as he, himself, started transmitting.

"Shut up!" bellowed Craigo. "Who're you? Where're you? What the—" Craigo lapsed into gutter profanity— "goes on here, you?" He released the transmit button.

He sank back in the control chair; and sat there, sweating and waiting. After a minute, he remembered; and turned up the volume on the speaker.

"—at once!" belled out the female voice. "Everybody on board here had food poisoning; and one

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

by one we put them in freeze-sleep until we could reach Earth Station One and a doctor! Only me! That filthy salmon mayonnaise! I knew it wasn't fit for people to eat. But I'm alone! Do you hear me, out there? Everybody's in freeze sleep but me! Oh, help!" The tone of the voice changed suddenly and became haughty. "Do you hear what I'm saying? Come at once! I am Taina Scarloff, of the North European Opera Company. Do you hear that? Who are you?"

Craigo fumbled about, found a package of unlighted cigars and pinched one alight. He shoved it into his mouth and pushed the talk button on the phone.

"Who?" he roared.

*"Taina Scarloff!"* trumpeted the speaker in furious silver tones.

"Never heard of you!" shouted Craigo, to whom opera was something, you put the word soap in front of it, old ladies listened to it all day. "Listen, this is Craigo DelMyer."

"What?"

"Craigo DelMyer, Mr. Interplanetary Freight Hand— Listen you drab!" roared Craigo, what she had said suddenly registering on him, "whadayou mean, *what?*"

"I don't care if you are a freight handler! I didn't mean what! There'll be a good tip in it for you if you'll just come get me and—"

The volume of sound from the speaker suddenly began to decline rapidly and be lost. Craigo grabbed for the control and twirled it upwards—then suddenly realized he must be passing out of range of the other ship. He swore, punched the controls over to manual and clumsily and inexpertly began to fumble with the manuals.

Fifteen minutes later, sweat standing out like oil on his face, he had the bright idea of turning the whole problem over to the computer. He did so, cut out the manuals, and went back to finish his nap.

Five hours later, when the alarm bell rang once more, he had finished his sleep, had a meal and was well into his second shaker of martinis since waking up. This time, since he was making the call, he took his time about sitting down at the panel and pressing the talk button.

"Now shaddup!" he said, without preamble.

Having said it, he released the button. The speaker burst to life overhead.

"Oh, it's you again! I thought I'd lost you. Where are you now? Where—"

The speaker broke off suddenly. There was a moment of tense breathing and then the voice continued in a tone of hard-held restraint.

"I'm listening."

"All right," said Craigo. He

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

reached for his martini and took a swallow from it. "Now listen. I am Mr. Craigo C. DelMyer, legal Representative of the Interplanetary Freight Handlers Union. You, I take it, are some moldy singer." Craigo released the button to hear if there was any reaction to the last part of this statement. Only the tense breathing sounded. Satisfied, he continued "Where do you think you're going?"

To Earth Station One!" snarled the speaker.

"No you aren't," said Craigo, happily. "You're headed in the other direction. Unless you're in a solar orbit, that is."

"I never pretended I could drive this monstrosity!" flared the speaker. "Just who do you think you—"

"Cool off," growled Craigo. "I'm going to save you."

"You are!" Joyously, from the speaker.

"Could I leave you here to perish?" said Craigo, in his public voice—the one he used for press interviews. There was more truth to that question than he cared to admit to this frill. The automatic log had taken note of his contact with the other ship. If he came back without it now, questions would be asked as soon as he hit Venus and the log was examined. Legal questions. On the other hand, turning up as a hero wouldn't do him any harm in the investigation back on Earth.

"So listen," went on Craigo. "I'll find you and bring my own ship alongside. Then I'll get a cable on you and tow you in."

"Yes, yes. Just get busy and *do* it!"

"Slow down," snarled Craigo. "First you got to tell me where you are."

"But I don't know where I am!"

"You're at the panel!" yelled Craigo. "You're standing in front of it, aren't you? Aren't you?"

"I'm not deaf! Where else would I be standing?"

"So look for the green buttons —all the controls colored green!" shouted Craigo. "Stupid frill!" he muttered.

"All right. I found them."

"Right below them's a coder and tape spill. Now, here's what you do—" And Craigo proceeded profanely to coach her on how to demand her ship's present position from its automatic log. It was not an easy, nor a polite process, but eventually he got a reading.

"All right," he growled, finally, "Now, sit down and cool off. I'll give your course and position to my computer, and it'll bring us close enough so that I can make contact by the manuals."

He turned to go to work with his own computer—after first thoughtfully cutting off his phone, so that he would not be disturbed any more than necessary by this Scarloff frill. When he had the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

figures set up he took another little nap.

He was awakened somewhat later by the alarm bell; and sat up to shut it off. Then he took a look at the computer which told him that his destination had been reached. Craigo grunted; and flicked on the outside viewers. He began to scan about for Taina's ship.

It was nowhere in sight.

Craigo went over the area three times on full magnification before he could believe it. When he did he swore loud and long. He turned viciously on his controls panel to hunt for the radar controls.

He couldn't find them.

Craigo admitted this, finally; but he was close to foaming at the mouth by the time he did. He gave up and sat seething before the forest of unknown buttons and dials on the panel. The radar controls were just not there. Or maybe they had been combined with some other control function. Or maybe modern ships didn't have radar. Or maybe—

Craigo jammed down the ship-to-ship button with a heavy thumb. There was a moment's pause; and then the speaker burst into hysterical life, overhead.

"Oh, there you are! Where've you been? How dare you cut phone contact with me? I thought something had happened. What do you mean—"

"Shaddup," said Craigo automatically, almost thoughtfully. He let her run on for a few minutes while he mulled things over. After a few moments she became apprehensive, and paused to listen. "Hey," he said then. "Were these the figures you gave me?" He reeled them off back to her.

"Say it again. Slower." she said.

He repeated them, more slowly. There was a pause from the far end.

"That's right," said Taina, suddenly. "What about them?"

"I'll tell you what about them," growled Craigo, clamping down on a fresh cigar. "Those are the figures I gave my computer, so I'm where you're supposed to be. And where are you?"

"Me?"

"You heard me."

"But I'm right here."

"The hell you are!" roared Craigo, losing his temper completely. "I'm here, and you're not. I can't see you anywhere. You're lost!"

Taina's voice went up on a shriek, like an ascending rocket.

"Oh! I knew this would happen! You brute! You fool! You idiot! I might have known no stupid freight handler could—"

Craigo bit his cigar in two, jammed down his send button and began to shout back at her, half in ordinary English, half in Chicago argot—

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Don't ky me none of your fat lip, scorby! I got better things to do than dingle no cash-seed wen . . ."

After about two minutes of this, they both began to run out of breath. Also it began to occur to each of them that probably their choicest insults were being wasted on empty vacuum, since both were sending and neither receiving. Accordingly, they almost simultaneously switched to receive—and of course heard nothing.

"Hey," said Craigo transmitting cautiously after a moment of this, "You still there?"

There was a second of silence. Then—

"Of course," said the speaker, coldly.

Neither one made an effort to renew the slanging sessions. They had burnt up their emotions for the moment; and were thinking sensibly, coolly, and a little uncomfortably.

Craigo was reflecting that after this, after getting this close to another vessel in distress, no lawyer in the Solar System could get him off a verdict of at least manslaughter if he tried to abandon Taina now. Taina was thinking with a touch of something like panic that he might do just that, and she had certainly better throttle back her temper until she was safe. But then, give her ten minutes with this lout, and—

Meanwhile, Craigo had got around to considering in what other ways contact between the ships could be made. His was the more practical mind.

His thoughts at the moment ran more or less to the effect that, since human beings were fallible but computers were not (at least, modern computers were not supposed to be), the two ships must actually be within a reasonable distance of each other. A reasonable distance, that was, as distances in space go. Say, a few hundred miles—certainly less than a thousand.

It all revealed the interesitng fact that he knew a lot less about handling a freight ship than he had ever dreamed he did. In fact, when you got right down to it, it amounted to what the sharp young union member had told him about start, turnover, and stop—and how to work the manual controls. The last was the only thing about this ship that bore any resemblence to the ones he had worked on.

"Mr. DelMyer?" said the speaker, perhaps a little too sweetly.

"What?" grunted Craigo.

"Oh, that's all right. I just wondered if you were still there."

"I'm thinking," said Craigo.

The speaker wisely said nothing. Craigo half-closed his eyes and thought—how to get next to a ship you can't even see?

It was not as if this was the first

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ime in his life Craigo had been orced to think. Craigo's life had een one series of problems after nother, clamoring to be solved. ut these problems had generally een human problems—in the ense that they concerned themelves with the way so-and-so ould jump, if Craigo did this, or hat. However, he was used to sing his wits. He even had a echnique; an ancient practise hich at one time had gone by he name of brainstorming, but hich Craigo, like a great many eople before and since that time ad simply discovered for himself.

Consequently, he began to list ff solutions practical, impracical, and downright nonsensical; n the hope that by keeping the deas flowing he would turn up ne that was workable.

He thought of signal guns, Roman Candles, lassoos, magnets, moke signals . . . and, after bout five minutes of this sort of ental pyrotechnics, came up ith a notion.

He thumbed the phone.

"Hey!" he said.

"What?" responded the speaker, romptly.

"You sing. Right?"

"I," said the speaker, icily, have a voice. Yes."

"All right," said Craigo. "You ing. Into the phone. I'll start auling this ship of mine around n manuals. If your voice starts to ade, I'll turn another way. After a while, you'll start growing louder. Then I'll be heading toward you. Get it?"

"I see," said Taina. "Very well." And, warming up with a few scales, she burst into *"Ardon gl'incensi—"* the mad scene from Lucia Di Lammermoor. She sang it all the way through, and finished feeling better than she had in some days. Automatically she switched the phone over to receive as she finished, to hear the applause.

"No! No!" Craigo was bellowing. "How can I check the cash-seed volume on the floddy speaker with you screeching all over the goddam place, like that? Forget the singing! Cut it out! Talk—just talk! And keep your voice steady!"

For a second the speaker above him was silent. The insult was simply too enormous to swallow in a second. Screeching—!

"And what, may I inquire, would you wish me to say?" she snarled at last in a tone which, while pitched to a conversational level, was so reeking with venom that it was an artistic achievement all by itself.

"Anything you scorby well feel like," replied Craigo coarsely.

To Craigo, women fell into two classes. Those you didn't need to slap down every time you looked at them; and those you did. He had already placed Taina in the second class, not realizing she

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fitted in neither. He was far from understanding this woman. For example, he was blissfully ignorant of the fact that the worst of his gutter insults had simply gone over her head. Taina had never learned Chicago slang—for roughly the same reason she had never got around to learning Eskimo, or Mandarin Chinese.

So, without bothering about it, she began talking; choosing, out of sheer shrewishness, however, to discuss current women's fashions. But here she missed her mark as badly as Craigo had missed it with her. In Craigo's opinion women did not talk, they made noise. He did not expect her to make sense; and he would have been more than a little surprised if she had. Noise, he had requested—a good, constant steady level of noise to check his volume by—and noise he was getting. So, for the present, anyway, he was not concerned with what words she made it with.

Later, it was to be different. After being talked at long enough anyone will listen. But for the present it did not bother him.

Meanwhile, she continued talking and he listening and moving around in space for a couple of hours. At the end of that time he had made some small movement in her direction, he thought, but it was going floddy slowly. Just then, however, he heard her break off in mid-sentence.

"My voice is going," she told him. "I can't go on. I've got to rest my throat."

"Rest!" yelped Craigo. "Rest?" She did not answer. "Are you crazy? You want to get rescued, or don't you? Talk!"

But here he was up against more than he had bargained for. It was opposition on the instinctive level. To protect her voice was a reflex with Taina. She could no more entertain the possibility of life without the silver trumpet of her vocal cords than he could accept losing the title of Mr. Interplanetary Freight Handlers. After a good half hour of haggling, it was finally decided that Craigo would tell her how to use the manuals (they were simple enough for a child to manipulate, anyway) and he would talk for a while, while she listened and tried to steer in his direction.

"—all right," growled Craigo at last. "You got the controls?"

"I've got them," replied Taina. "Start talking."

"Right—uh—" Craigo fumbled for a moment, then he chortled. "There was this guy walking down the street, see, and he sees this three-legged dog . . ."

And on and on he talked. But a man, even a man like Craigo who has spent most of his life in bars and hotel rooms, knows only so many jokes. He began to realize he was running dry when he was forced to delve back into his child-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ood and come up with clean nes. He switched over to speech-aking. There were a number of ıese he could reel off almost in is sleep. He gave Taina the *Welome, Visiting Brothers* speech, ıe *How Can We Keep The Welare Fund Going Without Suport?* speech, the *What Has Mangement Actually Done For Us? ll Tell You What Management las Actually Done For Us* speech . . and a host of others.

But eventually his voice, too, egan to tire. He stopped and 'aina took over again. She ran own a list of music critics, giving er acid-dipped opinion of each ne. Then she did much the same or a number of conductors . . .

Craigo took over once more and ave her a rundown on all the romen he had ever known . . .

Taina took over . . .

—What I want you to do [said he Chief Engineer to the Asistant] is get the picture of this. 'he two of them, hating each thers guts by this time, bobbling round in the middle of nowhere nd talking, talking, talking—bout ships, about shoes and sealıgwax, Moussorgsky, smoke-filled ooms, dressing rooms, backstage endettas, strong-arm methods, rtistic suicides that might have een murders, about acid thrown ı the face, about acid poured into throat-spray atomiser—about ersonal history, slander, enemies, triumphs, disaster; in short, about everything and anything that comes into the head of a man or woman who have been talking for hours and, for the sake of their lives must still go on talk-talk-talking forever.

Because this twin filibuster of theirs went on and on. They did not find each other in the first four or five hours. They did not find each other by the tenth hour, the fifteenth, or the twenty-first. Three times Craigo had to threaten to leave Taina to strangle or starve, depending on whether her air or food gave out first. Once, he had to pretend actually to leave, before she would put the hope of rescue ahead of the thought of irreparable damage to her voice.

Finally, twenty-nine hours and some minutes after Craigo had begun talking them together, bloodshot of eye, light-headed from exhaustion and croaking murderously at each other, they came at last to the moment in which Craigo, looking in his forward viewscreen, saw the dark cylinder of Taina's ship occulting the bright view of stars dead ahead.

It was all over.

The Chief Engineer stopped talking and poured himself some whisky; and drank it straight. He had been talking steadily himself, and it had made him thirsty.

"Well?" barked the Assistant, impatiently, his last champagne

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cocktail untouched and forgotten in its glass before him. "Well? Then what happened?"

"Well, then," said the Chief, slowly wiping his lips with the back of a hairy hand, "they got married."

"*Married?*"

"Well, not right away, of course," said the Chief, pouring himself a drop more whisky. "They had to wait until they reached Venus Orbital Dockage before they found someone with the authority to marry them. But when they did, there was no time wasted. And there you are. That's why I say, don't sneer at button-pushers."

"Button-pushers—" echoed the Assistant, bewilderedly.

"Certainly. The autopilot controls for ship-to-ship contact were right in front of Craigo all those hours, just waiting to be pressed after the computer pilotage brought him to a safe distance from Taina's ship, not far outside viewing range. That's why I say—never sneer at a button-pusher. It's not pushing a button that counts—it's knowing the proper button and the right time to push it that makes them worth their wages."

"But kag that scorby flod!" shouted the Assistant, "What I want to know is—why did they get *married?*"

"Why, they couldn't afford not to marry," said the Chief. "A wife can't testify against her husband in court, and vice versa—you know the System Laws. They'd both had just too much time to talk during those twenty-nine hours in space. They'd both said too much, told each other things they wouldn't admit to their closest friends—if either had a friend—things the very limit of which to a newspaper man would see them spending the rest of their lives in jail. They didn't dare *not* get married. Even now, after all these six years, they don't let each other get very far out of sight. And all," said the Chief, driving the point home with a thick finger jabbed at the Assistant's chest, "because Craigo didn't know what button to push."

The Assistant stared back at him, his jaw shoved forward in an expression seemingly caught between insult and disbelief. Then his face seemed to split apart all at once like a shattered window. He began to laugh. And then he began to roar.

---

**Coming . . .**

***The Oath*** **James Blish**

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

*Any school kid can tell you who first conquered Nanda Urbat, the toughest mountain in the world—but it takes someone wiser than a school kid to understand the story behind that conquest.*

# THE MAN ON TOP

by R. Bretnor

WHO WAS THE FIRST MAN TO reach the top of Nanda Urbat? Any school kid can tell you—*toughest mountain in the world. 26,318 feet, conquered finally by Geoffrey Barbank.*

I was forgotten. I was just the fellow who went along. The press gave Barbank the credit. He was the Man on Top, the Man on the Top of the World.

Only he wasn't, really. He knows that it's a lie. And that hurts.

A mountain, you know, is a quest, a mystery, a challenge to the spirit. Mallory, who died on Everest, knew that. But Barbank climbed Nanda Urbat simply to keep some other man from being first. Mysteries did not exist for him, and anyone who felt the sense of mystery was a fool. All men were fools to Barbank—or enemies.

I found that out the day I joined the expedition in Darjeeling. "The town's in a sweat about some flea-bag Holy Man," he told me after lunch. "Let's go and look the old fraud over. Might have a bit of fun."

So the two of us walked down from the hotel, and, all the way, he boasted of his plans. I can still see his face, big, cold, rectangular, as he discussed the men who'd tried and failed. Of course they'd muffed it. You couldn't climb Nanda Urbat on the cheap. He'd do things differently. All his equipment was better than the best that the many others had had. Because he had designed it. Because it had cost a mint.

It made me angry. But I had come too far to be turned back. I let him talk.

We turned into the compound of a temple. There was a quiet

© 1951 by Esquire, Inc.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

crowd there, squatting in the dust, and many monkeys. By a stone wall, under a huge umbrella, the Holy Man was seated on a woven mat. His long, white hair framed the strangest face I've ever seen —moon-round, unlined, perfectly symmetrical. His eyes were closed. Against the pale brown skin, his full lips curved upward like the horns of a Turkish bow. It was a statue's face, smiling a statue's smile, utterly serene.

The people seemed waiting for something. As we came through the crowd, no one spoke. But Barbank paid no heed. We halted up in front; and he talked on.

"What's more," he was saying, "I don't intend to bother with filthy Sherpa porters for the upper camps. Planes will drop the stuff."

That set me off. "The Sherpas are brave men," I told him, "and good mountaineers."

"Rot," he snapped. "They're beasts of burden." He pointed at the Holy Man. "There's a sample for you. Look at that smirk. Pleased as punch with his own hocus-pocus—dirt, his nakedness, and all. They've made no progress since the Year One."

The Holy Man was naked, or nearly so, but he was clean; his loincloth was spotless white. "Perhaps," I answered, "they're trying for something else."

And slowly, then, the Holy Man looked up. He spoke to Barbank. "We are," he said.

I met his eyes—and suddenly the statue came alive. It was as though I had seen only the shell of his serenity; now I saw its source. I felt that it was born, not in any rejection of the world, but in a knowledge of every human agony and joy.

"Yes, we are trying," the Holy Man went on. His voice was beautiful and strangely accented, and there was humor in it, and irony. "But for something else? I do not think so. It is just that we are trying differently, we of the East and West—and sometimes one cannot succeed without the other." Pausing, he measured Barbank with those eyes. "That is why I can help you, if you will only ask."

Barbank's mouth curled. "He's heard the gossip down in the bazaar," he said to me. "Well, he won't get a penny out of me."

The smile danced. "Must I explain? A mountain is much more than rock and ice. No man can conquer the hardest mountain in the world. His conquest can be only of himself."

I shivered. That was what Mallory had said.

"You damned old humbug!" Barbank's laugh roared out. "Are you trying to tell me *you* can help me reach the top?"

"I think I'd put it differently," the Holy Man replied. "To be precise, I must say this. You never will achieve your heart's desire

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

without my aid. Your way of doing things is not quite good enough."

Barbank's neck reddened. "Oh, isn't it?" he snarled. "Well, come along and watch! I can use one more mangy porter, I suppose."

The Holy Man raised his fragile hands. "Thank you—but no," he said gently.

Barbank spat in the dust. He pivoted and strode off, pushing roughly through the murmuring crowd.

It was then I decided that he must never be the Man on Top.

It is a long way from Darjeeling through Nepal to that dreadful mountain which the Tibetans call the Father of the Snows. The journey takes some weeks. We were eleven white men, but we soon found that we were not an expedition in the usual sense. We were Barbank's retainers, walled off by his contempt.

The others left him pretty much alone. I couldn't. The Holy Man's prediction was my obsession now. At every chance, I talked to Barbank about the mysteries of the peak—the awful Snow Men, whom the Tibetans all swear exist, and the same dark, pulsating flying things which Symthe had seen high on haunted Everest. I said that, very possibly, Madsen, James and Leverhome had reached the summit first—that he might get to be the Man on Top only to find some evidence they'd left.

By the time we reached our Base Camp on the Great East Glacier, I had become his enemy, who had to be put to shame. And there was only one way to do that. Though Kenningshaw and Lane were better men, he chose me for the assault. I had to *be* there, to see the Man on Top with my own eyes. That was fine. Because I could only stop Barbank from being first on top by being first myself.

We followed the traditional approach—up the Great East Glacier and the West Wall of the South Col—up to Camp Five, nearly five miles above the sea. And, all the way, the mountain laughed at us. Against us, it sent its cruel light cavalry, wind, mist and snow—harassing us, keeping us aware of deadly forces held in reserve.

Yet, when we stood at Camp Five and watched the plane from India trying to drop the final camp higher than any man had camped before, the sky was clear. We watched the pilot try, and circle, and lose eight separate loads. The ninth remained; its grapples held.

"I bought two dozen, all identical," said Barbank. "I told you there's nothing these natives do that we can't do better."

He and I reached Camp Six, at over twenty-six thousand feet, late the next afternoon. We set the tent up, and weighted it with cylinders of oxygen. We ate sup-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

per out of self-heating cans and crawled into our sleeping bags.

We rose before dawn, and found that the fine weather still held. Barbank looked at the vast dark mountain, at the broad yellow band beneath the summit pyramid, at the depths of rock and glacial ice below.

"And so I won't succeed?" he taunted me. *"You bloody fool."*

We went up. We mounted to the ridge, and stared down the awful precipice of the South Face. We worked toward the second step, where James and Leverhome were last seen. Small, keen lancets of wind thrust through our clothes down to the flowing blood. The summit was hidden behind its plume of cloud.

Toward that plume we worked. Even with oxygen, it was agony. Up there, the air is thin. The thinness is in your flesh and bones, and in your brain. You move, and pause, and your whole attention is confined to the next move.

On such a mountain, physically, there can be no question over who shall lead. But morally there can. I can remember husbanding my strength, giving Barbank a grudging minimum of aid. I can remember Barbank weakening, relinquishing the lead high on a summit slab. I can remember the look in Barbank's eyes.

The hours dragged. I moved. I ached. I forced myself to try to move again. Endlessly.

Then, without warning, the cloud-plume enfolded us. The Top of the World was fifty feet away. I knew that I could be the Man on Top, that I had Barbank where I wanted him. I stopped. I don't know why. I laughed and waved him on. He passed by, hating me.

He reached the summit edge. He turned his head. I could not see his lips, but I could feel their curl of triumph and their contempt. He turned again. And, as he turned, a single gust screamed past us and laid the summit bare. I saw its rock. I saw a wide depression packed with snow.

But in the center there was no snow at all, for it had melted. On his mat, naked and serene, the Holy Man was waiting. He smiled upon us with his statue's smile.

In that tone of pleased surprise with which one welcomes an unexpected guest, he spoke to Barbank. "How did you get up here?"

A strange sound came from Barbank's leather mask. Automatically, he pointed—at the harsh summit, the ridge, the slabs, the miles of rock and ice and snow.

The Holy Man lifted both his hands. His gesture was exquisite, polite, incredulous.

"You mean," he said, "you *walked?*"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

*The Good Doctor's recent article on "pi" drew so many letters, telegrams, and phone calls, that he has been encouraged to go further into the subject. He assures us that he is hopeful of emerging safely on the other side . . . on this or some future occasion.*

# TOOLS OF THE TRADE

*by Isaac Asimov*

THE RESPONSE I GOT TO MY article "A Piece of Pi" (May 1960) was overwhelming both in the number and the content of the letters. I was delighted and gratified because, for one thing, I knew much more about "pi" after reading the letters than I had known before.

For instance:

My 16-decimal value for "pi" was slightly wrong in the final decimal places, as a number of readers pointed out. What happened was that I had used the value calculated by a 15th Century Arab, without checking it against modern values. It never occurred to me it might be wrong, thanks to my frank, open and trusting nature.

Any number of readers sent me in longer and more accurate values than the one I presented. One gentleman sent in Shanks' complete value to 707 places, another sent in ENIAC's value to 2,000 places, and still another sent in the most recent value of all—to 10,000 places.

At once, a terrible urge came over me to find some excuse to include the entire 10,000-decimal value in an article. A rapid calculation assured me that in this manner I would be able to fill up half my article at once. Then there arose the thought of the man at the news-stand casually thumbing through the magazines in search of reading matter, grasping with sharpened interest at a copy of F&SF, opening it—and finding himself faced with a double page



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

spread, set solidly with digits. The worn face of The Kindly Editor rose before my eyes, blotting out the vision, and I sank back chastened.

However I will put in fifty places. Just fifty. Okay? Here it is and I *pray* I copy it correctly: 3.14159265358979323846264338327950288419716939937510. . . .

Another point. I suggested readers try the Leibniz series for the evaluation of "pi" to see how many terms it would take to calculate the value of "pi" more accurately than is given by the fraction 355/113. Several reported trying but all gave up quickly. About a dozen readers were old hands and avoided the trap. They sent in proofs showing that several million terms would have to be taken.

Then, again, two readers wrote to say that it was not a legislator in the state of Tennessee who wanted to set "pi" equal to a whole number by law (as I had stated) but one in the state of Indiana. One of those readers added that the bill (which was nearly passed back in the 1890's) would have set "pi" equal to exactly 4. Of course, 4 is a poorer approximation of the true value than 3, but then perhaps the author of the bill saw advantages in dealing with an even number since this would allow "pi" to be divided by two without the necessity of introducing higher mathematics in the form of fractions.

And, finally, I think everyone in the world wrote me that Johann Heinrich Lambert was the first to prove the irrationality of "pi," doing so in 1761. (One sterling soul sent me this information by *telegraph.*)

To pass on to the second reason for my delight and gratification at the reader response—I now feel completely justified in writing up my promised second piece of pi and here it is.

The Greek contribution to geometry consisted of idealizing and abstracting it. The Egyptians and Babylonians solved specific problems by specific methods but never tried to establish general rules.

The Greeks, however, strove for the general and felt that mathematical figures had certain innate properties that were eternal and immutable. They felt also that a consideration of the nature and relationships of these properties was the closest man could come to experiencing the sheer essence of beauty and divinity. (If I may veer off from science for a moment and invade the sacred precincts of the humanities, I might point out that just this notion was expressed by Edna St. Vincent Millay in a famous line that goes: "Euclid alone has looked on Beauty bare.")

Well, in order to get down to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the ultimate bareness of Beauty, one had to conceive of perfect, idealized figures made up of perfect idealized parts. For instance, the ideal line consisted of length and nothing else. It had neither thickness nor breadth nor anything, in fact, but length. Two ideal lines, ideally and perfectly straight, intersected at an ideal and perfect point, which had no dimensions at all, only position. A circle was a line that curved in perfectly equal fashion at all points; and every point on that curve was precisely equally distant from a particular point called the center of the circle.

Unfortunately, although one can imagine such abstractions, one cannot communicate them as abstractions alone. In order to explain the properties of such figures (and even in order to investigate them on your own) it is helpful, almost essential in fact, to draw crass, crude and ungainly approximations in wax, on mud, on blackboard or on paper, using a pointed stick, chalk, pencil, or pen. (Beauty must be swathed in drapery in mathematics, alas, as in life.)

Furthermore, in order to prove some of the ineffably beautiful properties of various geometrical figures, it was usually necessary to make use of more lines than existed in the figure alone. It might be necessary to draw a new line through a point, and make it parallel or, perhaps, perpendicular to a second line. It might be necessary to divide a line into equal parts, or double the size of an angle.

To make all this drawing as neat and as accurate as possible, instruments must be used. It follows naturally, I think, once you get into the Greek way of thinking, that the fewer and simpler the instruments used for the purpose, the closer the approach to the ideal.

Eventually, the tools were reduced to an elegant minimum of two. One was a straight-edge for the drawing of straight lines. This was not a ruler, mind you, with inches or centimeters marked off on it. It was an unmarked piece of wood (or metal or plastic, for that matter) which can do no more than guide the marking instrument into the form of a straight line.

The second tool was the compass which, while most simply used to draw circles, will also serve to mark off equal segments of lines, will draw intersecting arcs that mark a point that is equidistant from two other points and so on.

I presume most of you have taken plane geometry and have utilized these tools to construct one line perpendicular to another, to bisect an angle, to circumscribe a circle about a triangle and so on. All these tasks and an in-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

finite number of others can be performed by using the straight-edge and compass in a finite series of manipulations.

By Plato's time, of course, it was known that by using more complex tools, certain constructions could be simplified; and, in fact, that some constructions could be performed which, until then, could not be performed by straight-edge and compass alone. That, to the Greek geometers, was something like shooting a fox or a sitting duck, or catching fish with worms or looking at the answers in the back of the book. It got results but it just wasn't the gentlemanly thing to do. The straight-edge and compass were the only "proper" tools of the geometrical trade.

Now was it felt that this restriction to the compass and straight-edge unduly limited the geometer. It might be tedious at times to stick to the tools of the trade; it might be easier to take a short cut by using other devices; but surely the straight-edge and compass alone could do it all, if you were only persistent enough and ingenious enough.

For instance, if you are given a line of a fixed length which is allowed to represent the numeral, 1, it is possible to construct another line, by compass and straight-edge alone, exactly twice that length to represent 2, or another line to represent 3 or 5 or 500 or ½, or ⅓ or ⅕ or ⅗ or 2⅗ or 27 16/23. In fact, by using compass and straight-edge only, any rational number (*i.e.* any integer or fraction) could be duplicated geometrically. You could even make use of a simple convention (which the Greeks never did, alas) to make it possible to represent both positive and negative rational numbers.

Once irrational numbers were discovered, numbers for which no definite fraction could be written, it might seem that compass and straight-edge would fail, but even then they did not.

For instance, the square root of 2 has the value 1.414214 . . . and on and on without end. How, then, can you construct one line which is 1.414214 . . . times as long as another when you cannot possibly ever know exactly how many times as long you want it to be.

Actually, it's easy. Imagine a given line from point A to point B. I can do this without a diagram, I think, if only to please The Kindly Editor, but if you feel the need you can sketch the lines as you read. It won't be hard.) Let this line, AB, represent 1.

Next, construct a line at B, perpendicular to AB. Now you have two lines forming a right angle. Use the compass to draw a circle with its center at B, where the two lines meet, and passing through A. It will cut the perpen-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dicular line you have just drawn at a point we can call C. Because of the well-known properties of the circle, line BC is exactly equal to line AB, and is also 1.

Finally, connect points A and C with a third straight line.

That line, AC, as can be proven by geometry, is exactly $\sqrt{2}$ times as long as either AB or BC, and therefore represents the irrational quantity $\sqrt{2}$.

Don't, of course, think, that it is now only necessary to measure AC in terms of AB to obtain an exact value of $\sqrt{2}$. The construction was drawn by imperfect instruments in the hands of imperfect men and is only a crude approximation of the ideal figures they represent. It is the ideal line represented by AC that is $\sqrt{2}$, and not AC itself in actual reality.

It is possible, in similar fashion, to use the straight-line and compass to represent an infinite number of other irrational quantities.

In fact, the Greeks had no reason to doubt that any conceivable number at all could be represented by a line that could be constructed by use of straight-edge and ruler alone in a finite number of steps. Since constructions usually boiled down to the construction of certain lines representing certain numbers it was felt that anything that could be done with any tool could be done by straight-edge and compass alone. Sometimes the details of the straight-edge and compass construction might be elusive and remain undiscovered, but eventually, the Greeks felt, given enough ingenuity, insight, intelligence, intuition and luck, the construction could be worked out.

For instance, the Greeks never learned how to divide a circle into 17 equal parts by straight-edge and compass alone. Yet it could be done. The method was not discovered until 1801, when the German mathematician, Carl Friedrich Gauss, then only 24, managed it. Once he divided the circle into seventeen parts, he could connect the points of division by a straight-edge to form a regular polygon of 17 sides (a "septendecagon"). The same system could be used to construct a regular polygon of 257 sides and of an infinite number of other polygons with still more sides, the number of sides possible being calculated by a formula which I won't give here.

If the construction of a simple thing like a regular septendecagon could elude the great Greek geometers and yet be a perfectly soluble problem in the end, why could not any conceivable construction, however puzzling it might seem, be prove soluble in the end?

As an example, one construction that fascinated the Greeks was this: Given a circle, construct a square of the same area.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This is called "squaring the circle."

There are several ways of doing this. Here's one method. Measure the radius of the circle with the most accurate measuring device you have and say, just for fun, that the radius proves to be one inch long precisely. (This method will work for a radius of any length so why not luxuriate in simplicity?) Square that radius, leaving the value still 1, since 1 x 1 is 1, thank goodness, and multiply that by the best value of "pi" you can find. (Were you wondering when I'd get back to "pi?") If you use 3.1415926 as your value of "pi," the area of the circle proves to be 3.1415926 square inches.

Now take the square root of that, which is 1.7724539 inches and draw a straight line exactly 1.7724539 inches long, using your measuring device to make sure of the length. Construct a perpendicular at each end of the line, mark off 1.7724539 inches on each perpendicular and connect those two points.

*Voila!* You have a square equal in area to the given circle. Of course, you may feel uneasy. Your measuring device isn't infinitely accurate and neither is the value of "pi" which you used. Does not this mean that the squaring of the circle is only approximate and not exact?

Yes, but it is not the details that count but the principle. We can *assume* the measuring device to be perfect, and the value of "pi" which was used to be accurate to an infinite number of places. After all, this is just as justifiable as assuming our actual drawn lines to represent ideal lines, to consider our straight edge perfectly straight and our compass to end in two perfect points. In principle, we have indeed perfectly squared the circle.

Ah, but we have made use of a measuring device, which is not one of the only two tools of the trade allowed a gentleman geometer. That marks you as a cad and bounder and you are hereby voted out of the club.

Here's another method of squaring the circle. What you really need, assuming the radius of your circle to represent 1, is another straight line representing $\sqrt{\text{"pi"}}$. A square built on such a line would have just the area of a unit-radius circle. How to get such a line? Well, if you could construct a line equal to "pi" times the length of the radius, there are known methods, using straightedge and compass alone, to construct a line equal in length to the square root of that line, hence representing the $\sqrt{\text{"pi"}}$ which we are after.

But it is simple to get a line that is "pi" times the radius. According to a well-known formula, the circumference of the circle is equal in length to twice the radius

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

times "pi." So let us imagine the circle resting on a straight line and let's make a little mark at the point where the circle just touches the line. Now slowly turn the circle so that it moves along the line (without slipping) until the point you have marked makes a complete circuit and once again touches the line. Make another mark where it again touches. Thus, you have marked off the circumference of the unit-radius circle on a straight line and the distance between the two marks is twice "pi."

Bisect that marked-off line by the usual methods of straight-edge and compass geometry and you have a line representing "pi." Construct the square root of that line and you have $\sqrt{\text{"pi."}}$

*Voila!* By that act, you have, in effect, squared the circle.

But no. I'm afraid you're still out of the club. You have made use of a rolling circle with a mark on it and that comes under the heading of an instrument other than straight-edge and compass.

The point is that there are any number of ways of squaring the circle but the Greeks were unable to find any way of doing it with straight-edge and compass alone in a finite number of steps. (They spent I don't know how many man-hours of time searching for a method and, looking back on it, it might all seem an exercise in futility now, but it wasn't. In their search, they came across all sorts of new curves, such as the conic sections, and new theorems, which were far more valuable than the squaring of the circle would have been.)

Although the Greeks failed to find a method, the search continued and continued. People kept on trying and trying and trying and trying—

And now let's change the subject for a while.

Consider a simple equation such as $2x - 1 = 0$. You can see that setting $x = \frac{1}{2}$ will make a true statement out of it for $2(\frac{1}{2}) - 1$ is indeed equal to zero. No other number can be substituted for $x$ in this equation and yield a true statement.

By changing the integers in the equation (the "coefficients" as they are called), $x$ can be made to equal other specific numbers. For instance in $3x - 4 = 0$, $x$ is equal to $\frac{4}{3}$; and in $7x + 2 = 0$, $x = -\frac{2}{7}$. In fact, by choosing the coefficients appropriately, you can have as a value of $x$ any positive or negative integer or fraction whatever.

But in such an "equation of the first degree" you can only obtain rational values for $x$. You can't possibly have an equation of the form $Ax + B = 0$, where A and B are rational, such that $x$ will turn out to be equal to $\sqrt{2}$, for instance.

The thing to do is to try a more

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

complicated variety of equation. Suppose you try $x^2 - 2 = 0$, which is an "equation of the second degree" because it involves a square. If you solve for $x$, you'll find the answer $\sqrt{2}$, when substituted for $x$ will yield a true statement. In fact, there are two possible answers, for the substitution of $-\sqrt{2}$ for $x$ will also yield a true statement.

You can build up equations of the third degree, such as $Ax^3 + Bx^2 + Cx + D = 0$, or of the fourth degree (I don't have to give any more examples, do I?) or higher. Solving for $x$ in each case becomes more and more difficult, but will give solutions involving cube roots, fourth roots and so on.

In any equation of this type, (a "polynomial equation") the value of $x$ can be worked out by manipulating the coefficients. To take the simplest case, in the general equation of the first degree: $Ax + B = 0$, the value of $x$ is $-B/A$. In the general equation of the second degree: $Ax^2 + Bx + C = 0$, there are two solutions. One is

$$\frac{-B + \sqrt{B^2 - 4AC}}{2A}$$

and the other is

$$\frac{-B - \sqrt{B^2 - 4AC}}{2A}$$

Solutions get progressively more complicated and eventually, no general solution can be given, although specific solutions can still be worked out. The principle remains, however, that in all polynomial equations, the value of $x$ can be expressed by use of a finite number of integers involved in a finite number of operations, these operations consisting of addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, raising to a power ("involution") and extracting roots ("evolution").

These operations are the only ones used in ordinary algebra and are therefore called "algebraic operations." Any number which can be derived from the integers by a finite number of algebraic operations in any combination is called an "algebraic number." To put it in reverse, any algebraic number is a possible solution for some polynomial equation.

Now it so happens that the geometric equivalent of all the algebraic operations can be performed by straight-edge and compass alone. If a given line represents 1, therefore, it follows that a line representing *any* algebraic number can be constructed by straight-edge and compass in a finite number of manipulations.

Well, then, do the algebraic numbers include *all* numbers? Are there numbers which cannot be solutions to any polynomial equation?

To begin with, all possible rational numbers can be solutions to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

equations of the first degree, so all rational numbers are algebraic numbers. Then, certainly some irrational numbers are algebraic numbers for it is easy to write equations for which $\sqrt{2}$ or $\sqrt[3]{15} - 3$ are solutions.

But can there be irrational numbers which will not serve as a solution to a single one of the infinite number of different polynomial equations in each of all the infinite number of degrees possible?

In 1844, the French mathematician, Joseph Liouville, finally found a way of showing that such non-algebraic numbers did exist. (No, I don't know how he did it, but if any reader thinks I can understand the method, and I must warn him not to overestimate me, he is welcome to send it in.).

However, having proved that non-algebraic numbers existed, Liouville could still not find a specific example. The nearest he came was to show that a number called *e* could not serve as the root for any conceivable equation of the second degree.

(At this point, I am tempted to launch into a discussion of the number *e* because, as those of you who read "A Piece of Pi" may recall, this whole thing started with a footnote to my article "Those Crazy Ideas" (January, 1960) where I mentioned the equation $e^{i\pi} = -1$. In addition, to two articles on "pi," I ought obviously write one on *e* and one on *i*, if things break right; that is, if The Kindly Editor doesn't pull a shotgun off the wall and run me out of town. But I'll resist temptation.[1] I'll say only that *e* is an irrational number with a value that has now been calculated to 60,000 places, of which the first 25 decimals are, and I pray I copy it correctly: 2.71828182845904523536028-74 . . .)

Then, in 1873, the French mathematician, Charles Hermite, worked out a method of analysis that showed that *e* could not be the root of any conceivable equation of any conceivable degree and hence was actually not an algebraic number. It was, in fact, what is called a "transcendental number"; one which transcends (that is, goes beyond) the algebraic operations and cannot be produced from the integers by any finite number of those operations. (That is, $\sqrt{2}$ is irrational but can be produced by a single algebraic operation, taking the square root of 2. The value of *e* on the other hand can be calculated only by the use of infinite series involving an infinite number of additions, divisions, subtractions and so on.)

Using the methods developed by Hermite, the German mathema-

[1] *Others may not.*—THE KINDLY EDITOR

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tician, Ferdinand Lindemann, in 1882, proved that "pi," too, was a transcendental number.

This is crucial for purposes of this article, for it meant that a line segment equivalent to "pi" cannot be built up by the use of the straight edge and compass alone in a finite number of manipulations. *The circle cannot be squared by straight edge and compass alone.* It is as impossible to do this as to find an exact value for $\sqrt{2}$, or to find an odd number that is an exact multiple of 4.

One odd point about transcendental numbers—

They were difficult to find, but now that they have been, they prove to be present in overwhelming numbers. Practically any expression that involves either *e* or "pi" is transcendental, provided the expression is not arranged so that the *e* or "pi" cancel out. Practically all expressions involving logarithms (which involve *e*) and practically all expressions involving trigonometric functions (which involve "pi") are transcendental. Expressions involving numbers raised to an irrational power, such as $x^{\sqrt{2}}$ are transcendental.

In fact, if you go back to my article "Varieties of the Infinite" (September 1959) (and I assume each one of you reads all my articles and treasures them all for frequent reference and rereading), you will understand me when I say that it has been proved that the algebraic numbers can be put into one-to-one correspondence with the integers, but the transcendental numbers cannot.

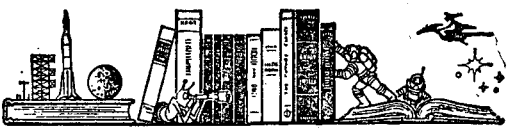
This means that the algebraic numbers, although infinite, belong to the lowest of the transfinite numbers, ALEPH-NULL, while the transcendental numbers belong to the next higher transfinite, ALEPH-ONE. There are thus infinitely more transcendental numbers than there are algebraic numbers.

To be sure, the fact that the transcendentality of "pi" is now well-established, and has been for nearly a century, doesn't stop the ardent circle-squarers, who continue to work away desperately with straight-edge and compass and continue to report solutions.

So if *you* know a way to square the circle by straight-edge and compass alone, I congratulate you, but you have a fallacy in your proof somewhere. And it's no use sending it to me, because I'm a rotten mathematician and couldn't possibly find the fallacy, but I tell you anyway, it's there.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# BOOKS



## WALDEN TWO

**by Damon Knight**

MACMILLAN HAS REISSUED IN paper format ($1.65) an interesting and highly important novel which I missed when it first appeared in 1948: WALDEN TWO, by B. F. Skinner.

A university professor named Burris has been feeling a vague dissatisfaction since the war. "For several years the conviction had been forcing itself upon me that I was unable to contemplate my former students without emotion. [. . .] So far as I could see, their pitiful display of erudition was all I had to show for my life as a teacher, and I looked upon that handiwork not only without satisfaction, but with actual dismay."

When two of these ex-students turn up, just out of the army, to remind him of something he had said about Utopian societies, he is first staggered ("And, good God, just what had I told them?"), then intrigued. Burris recalls with some effort the romantic ideas of a colleague, T. E. Frazier, which he must have passed along in an idle moment. Looking Frazier up, he discovers that in the intervening years the man has apparently set himself up in the sort of experimental society he advocated: his current address is Walden Two, R.D. 1, Canton, in "a neighboring state." Burris and the two students, Rogers and Jamnik, go to see what it's like.

With them go Rogers' and Jamnik's girl-friends, and a philosophy professor named Castle. They find Walden Two a self-sufficient farming community of about a thousand, living in rammed-earth dwellings and organizing their activity by a system of "labor-credits."

The little world Burris and his companions see during the next few days is charming and disturbing: with more time for leisure than work (they work an average four-hour day), the Waldenites are cheerful, relaxed,



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

courteous. Even the very young children, brought up in crèches, are well-behaved. Fear and hunger as economic motives have been eliminated; there is no politics and no discord.

As Frazier points out, this differs from all other Utopias in being a feasible project, right here, right now, in the midst of "normal" society. Walden Two's women are set free by "industrializing housewifery"; its young men and women, not compelled to delay marriage for economic reasons, become parents at 17 or 18.

People who are repelled by the human waste and irrationality of present forms of society will find this an absorbing book, in spite of several flaws. As a novel, WALDEN TWO makes its best showing in the first half: Burris and the other characters are warmly real, and Frazier in particular is such an exasperatingly ambiguous person that the reader never knows from one moment to the next whether to trust what he says or not. Near the middle of the book, however, all but the pretense of novelistic development is suddenly dropped, in favor of an outrageously extended Frazier monologue. This is unforgivable because it is dull, and because it turns the book into propaganda, the characters into mere straw figures.

As propaganda, WALDEN TWO is disturbing in several senses. Discounting some features which are hard to get used to simply because of their novelty, and some others which are probably wrong guesses (the pedagogy, and the glass dinnerware), there's still one thing that bothers me very much: the communal *mystique* which grows toward the end of the book. It's one thing to organize an experimental society communally for reasons of economy, and another, it seems to me, to hymn the virtues of " 'Communal authorship, communal art, communal music.' "

All the same, this is (I repeat) a fascinating and important book. Some of Skinner's arguments may be open to question, but of one thing there does not seem to be any reasonable doubt: We *could* do this, here and now.

---

EDITOR'S NOTE: *We are extremely regretful that we find it necessary to report Damon Knight's resignation as F&SF's book reviewer. Mr. Knight's special brand of perceptive, incisive criticism will, we know, be missed.*

*At the same time, it is gratifying to be able to announce that we have persuaded Alfred Bester to take over the column, beginning with our next issue.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

*Serving as an explication of what Burton Raffel was speaking of earlier in this issue. . . . It is obviously more parable than sociological extrapolation, but we doubt that you will easily set aside its horrible realism.*

# THE NRACP

## *by George P. Elliott*

(*The NRACP is the National Relocation Authority: Colored Persons. The CPR is the Colored Persons Reserve. PR is Public Relations.*)

March 3

Dear Herb,

Your first letter meant more to me than I can say, but the one I received yesterday has at last aroused me from my depression. I will try to answer both of them at once. You sensed my state of mind; I could tell it from little phrases in your letter—"open your heart, though it be only to a sunset," "try reading *Finnegans Wake;* if you ever get *into* it you won't be able to fight your way out again for months." I cherish your drolleries. They are little oases of half-light and quiet in this rasping, blinding landscape.

How I hate it! Nothing but the salary keeps me here. Nothing. I have been driven into myself in a very unhealthy way. Long hours, communal eating, the choice between a badly lighted reading room full of people and my own cell with one cot and two chairs and a table, a swim in a chlorinated pool, walks in this violent, seasonless, arid land—what is there? There seem to be only two varieties of people here: those who "have culture," and talk about the latest *New Yorker* cartoons, listen to imitation folksongs and subscribe to one of the less popular book clubs; and those who play poker, talk sports and sex, and drink too much. I prefer the latter type as people, but unfortunately I do not enjoy their activities, except drinking; and since I know the language and mores of the former type, and have more inclination toward them, I am thrown with people whom I dislike intensely. In this muddle I

© *1949 by George P. Elliott; reprinted by permission of the Hudson Review.*



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

find myself wishing, selfishly, that you were here; your companionship would mean so much to me now. But you knew better than I what the CPR would mean—you were most wise to stay in Washington, most wise. You will be missing something by staying there—but I assure you it is something well worth missing.

I must mention the two universal topics of conversation. From the filing clerks to my division chief I know of no one, including myself, who does not talk absorbedly about mystery stories. A few watered-down eclectics say they haven't much preference in mysteries, but the folksongers to a man prefer the tony, phoney Dorothy Sayers-S. S. Van Dine type of pseudo-literary snobbish product, and the horsey folk prefer the Dashiell Hammett romantic cum violent realism; there is one fellnamed O'Doone who wears those heavy-rimmed, owlish glasses that were so popular some years ago—who does nothing but read and reread Sherlock Holmes, and he has won everyone's respect, in some strange way, by this quaint loyalty. He's quite shy, in a talkative, brittle way, but I think I could grow fond of him.—Yet everyone finds a strong need to read the damnable things, so strong that we prefer the absolute nausea of reading three in one day—I did it once myself, for three days on end—to not reading any. What is it actually that we prefer not to do? I can only think of Auden's lines, "The situation of our time Surrounds us like a baffling crime." Of our time, and of this job.

What are we doing here?—that is the other subject none of us can let alone. We are paid fantastic salaries—the secretary whom I share with another writer gets $325 a month, tell Mary *that* one—and for one whole month we have done nothing while on the job except to read all the provisions and addenda to the Relocation Act as interpreted by the Authority, or to browse at will in the large library of literature by and about Negroes, from sociological studies to newspaper poetry and dialect. You will know the Act generally of course; but I hope you are never for any reason subjected to this Ph.D-candidate torture of reading to exhaustion about a subject in which you have only a general interest. But the *why* of this strange and expensive indoctrination, is totally beyond me. I thought that I was going to do much the same sort of PR work here on the spot as we had been doing in the State Department; I thought the salary differential was just a compensation for living in this hell-hole. That's what everyone here had thought too. It appears, however, that there is something more important brewing. In the whole month I have been here—I swear it—I have

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

turned out only a couple of articles describing the physical charms of this desiccated cesspool; they appeared in Negro publications which I hope you have not even heard of. And beyond that I have done nothing but bore myself to death by reading Negro novels and poetry.

They are a different tribe altogether; their primeval culture is wonderful enough to merit study —I would be the last to deny it. But not by me. I have enough trouble trying to understand the rudiments of my own culture without having this one pushed off onto me.

—I have been stifled and confused for so long that all my pent-up emotions have found their worthiest outlet in this letter to you, my dear friend. I have been vowing (as we used to vow to quit smoking, remember?) to stop reading mysteries but my vows seldom survive the day. Now I do solemnly swear and proclaim that each time I have the urge to read a mystery, I will instead write a letter to you. If these epistles become dull and repetitious, just throw them away without reading them. I'll put a mark—say an M —on the envelope of these counter-mystery letters, so you needn't even open them if you wish. I'm sure there will be a lot of them.

Does this sound silly? I suppose it does. But I am in a strange state of mind. There's too much sunlight and the countryside frightens me and I don't understand anything.

Bless you,
ANDY

March 14

Dear Herb,

It wasn't as bad as I had feared, being without mysteries. We get up at seven and go to work at eight. Between five and six in the afternoon, there's time for a couple of highballs. From seven or so, when dinner is over, till ten or eleven—that's the time to watch out for. After you have seen the movie of the week and read *Time* and the *New Yorker*, then you discover yourself, with that autonomic gesture with which one reaches for a cigarette, wandering toward the mystery shelf and trying to choose between Carter Dickson and John Dickson Carr (two names for the same writer, as I hope you don't know). On Sundays there's tennis in the early morning and bowling in the afternoon. But then those gaping rents in each tightly woven, just tolerable day remain, no matter what you do. At first I thought I should have to tell myself bedtime stories. One evening I got half-drunk in the club-rooms and absolutely potted alone in my own room afterwards. First time in my life. Another time, O'Doone and I sat up till midnight composing an "Epi-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

taph for a Mongoose." I can't tell you how dreary some of our endeavors were; O'Doone still quotes one of mine occasionally. He's a strange fellow, I can't exactly figure him out but I like him in an oblique sort of way. We neither one fit into any of three or four possible schemes of things here and we share a good deal in general outlook. But he can amuse himself with a cerebral horseplay which only makes me uneasy. O'Doone has a French book—God knows where he got it—on Senegalese dialects so he goes around slapping stuffy people on the back and mumbling. "Your grandmother on your father's side was a pig-faced gorilla" or else a phrase which in Senegalese has something to do with transplanting date trees but which in English sounds obscene, and then he laughs uproariously. In any event, he's better off than I, who am amused by almost nothing.

Now that you have been spared the threatened dejection of my counter-mystery letters, I must confess to the secret vice which I have taken up in the past week. It grows upon me too, it promises to become a habit which only age and infirmity will break. I had thought it a vice of middle age (and perhaps it is—are we not 38, Herb? When does middle age commence?). I *take walks*. I take long walks alone. If I cannot say that I enjoy them exactly, yet I look forward to them with that eagerness with which an adolescent will sometimes go to bed in order to continue the dream which waking has interrupted.

Not that my walks are in any way dreamlike. They are perfectly real. But they take place in a context so different from any of the social or intellectual contexts of the CPR day, and they afford such a strong emotional relief to it, that I think these walks may be justly compared to a continued dream. My walks, however, have a worth of their own such as dreams can never have, for instead of taking me from an ugly world to a realm of unexplained symbols, they have driven me toward two realities, about which I must confess I have had a certain ignorance: myself, and the natural world. And standing, as I feel I do, at the starting-point of high adventure, I feel the explorer's excitement, and awe, and no self-pity at all.

I have recaptured—and I am not embarrassed to say it—the childhood delight in stars. That's a great thing to happen to a man, Herb—to be able to leave the smoke- and spite-laden atmosphere of bureaucracy, walk a few miles out into the huge, silent desert, and look at the stars with a delight whose purity needs no apology and whose expansiveness need find no words for description. I am astonished by the sight

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of a Joshua tree against the light blue twilight sky, I am entranced by the vicious innocence of one of the kinds of cactus that abound hereabouts, I enjoy these garish sunsets with a fervor that I once considered indecent. I cannot say I like this desert—certainly not enough to live in it permanently—but it has affected me, very deeply. I think that much of my trouble during my first month here was resisting the force of the desert. Now, I no longer resist it, yet I have not submitted to it; rather I have developed a largeness of spirit, a feeling of calm and magnificence. Which I am sure is in part lightheadedness at having such a weight of nasty care removed all at once, but which is wonderful while it lasts.

But it's not *just* lightheadedness. Some obstruction of spirit, an obstruction of whose existence I was not even aware, has been removed within me, so that now I can and dare observe the complexities of that catalogued, indifferent, unaccountable natural world which I had always shrugged at. One saw it from train windows, one dealt with it on picnics; one admired the nasturtiums and peonies of one's more domesticated friends, one approved of lawns and shade trees. What then? What did one know of the rigidity of nature's order or of the prodigality with which she wastes and destroys and errs? I came here furnished only with the ordinary generic names of things—snake, lizard, toad, rabbit, bug, cactus, sage-brush, flower, weed—but already I have watched a road-runner kill a rattlesnake, and I am proud that I know how rabbits drink. Do you know how rabbits drink? If you ask what difference it makes to know this, I can happily reply, "None at all, but it gives me pleasure." A pleasure which does not attempt to deny mortality, but accepts it and doesn't care—that is a true pleasure, and one worth cherishing.

11 *p. m.*

I owe it to you, I know, to give a somewhat less personal, less inward account of this place. But a calculated, itemized description of anything, much less of so monstrous a thing as a desert, that is beyond me. Instead I'll try to give you an idea of what effect such physical bigness can have upon one.

Our buildings are situated at the head of a very long valley—the Tehuala River Valley—which is partially arable and which, in both the upper and lower regions, is good for grazing purposes. The highway into the valley, that is, the highway that leads to the East, as well as the railroad, runs not far from our settlement. Being Public Relations, we are located just within the fence (it is a huge, barbarous fence with guards). We

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

have had a rather surprising number of visitors already, and hundreds more are expected during the summer. Our eight buildings are flat-roofed, gray, of a horizontal design, and air-conditioned. But our view of the valley is cut off by a sharp bend about four or five miles below us. The tourists, in other words, can see almost nothing of the valley, and just as little of the Reserve stretching for 800 miles to the southwest, for this is the only public entrance to the Reserve, and no airplanes are permitted over any part of it. Around the turn in the upper valley, is yet another even more barbarous, even better guarded fence, past which no one goes except certain Congressmen, the top officials (four, I believe) in the NRACP, and SSE (Special Service Employees, who, once they have gone past that gate, do not return and do not communicate with the outside world even by letter). All this secrecy—you can fill in details to suit yourself—is probably unnecessary, but it does succeed in arousing an acute sense of mystery and speculation about the Reserve. Well, being no more than human I walked the five miles to the bend, climbed a considerable hill nearby, and looked out over the main sweep of the valley for the first time. I was hot and tired when I reached the foot of the hill, so I sat down—it was around 5:30—and ate the lunch I had brought. When I reached the top of the hill the sun was about to set; the long shadows of the western hills lay over the floor of the valley and in some places they extended halfway up the hills to the east. Far, far to the west, just to the north of the setting sun, was a snow-capped mountain; and immediately in front of me, that is, a mile and a half or so away, stretched the longest building I have ever seen in my life. It had a shed roof rising away from me; there were no windows on my side of the building; nothing whatsoever broke the line of its continuous gray back; and it was at least a mile long, probably longer. Beyond it, lay dozens of buildings exactly like this one except for their length; some of them ran, as the long one did, east and west, some ran north and south, some aslant. I could not estimate to my satisfaction how large most of them were; they seemed to be roughly about the size of small factories. The effect which their planner had deliberately calculated and achieved was that of a rigidly patterned, unsymmetrical (useless?) articulation of a restricted flat area. Nothing broke the effect, and for a reason which I cannot define, these buildings in the foreground gave a focus and order to the widening scene that lay before me such that I stood for the better part of an hour experiencing a pure joy—a joy only

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

heightened by my grateful knowledge that these Intake buildings were designed to introduce an entire people to the new and better world beyond (and I must confess I felt the better that I myself was, albeit humbly, connected with the project). The fine farms and ranches and industries and communities which would arise from these undeveloped regions took shape in the twilight scene before me, shimmering in the heat waves rising from the earth. But presently it was quite dark—the twilights are very brief here—and I was awakened from my reverie by the lights going on in one of the buildings before me. I returned to the PR settlement, and to my solitary room, in a state of exaltation which has not yet deserted me.

For an hour, the Universe and History co-extended before me; and they did not exclude me; for while I am but a grain on the shore of event, yet only within my consciousness did this coextending take place and have any meaning. For that long moment, mine was the power.

I will write again soon.

ANDY

March 20

Dear Herb,

You complain that I didn't say anything directly about my voyage of discovery into myself, as I had promised in my last letter. And that the internal high pressures of urban life are blowing me up like a balloon in this rarefied atmosphere.

Maybe so. I'll try to explain what has been going on. But I forgot to take a cartographer on my voyage, so that my account may resemble, in crudeness, that of an Elizabethan freebooter in Caribbean waters. (If I had the energy, I'd try to synthesize these balloon-voyage metaphors; but I haven't.)

It all began when I asked myself, on one of my walks, why I was here, why I had taken this job. $8,000 a year—yes. The social importance of the project—maybe (but not my personal importance to the project). Excitement at being in on the beginning of a great experiment in planning—yes. The hope of escaping from the pressures of Washington life—yes. These are valid reasons all of them, but in the other balance—why I should want *not* to come here—are better reasons altogether. An utter absence of urban life. No friends. No chance of seeing Betty. The loss of permanent position (this one you pointed out most forcefully) in State for a better paid but temporary job here. Loss of friends. Too inadequate a knowledge of my duties, or of the whole NRACP for that matter, to permit me to have made a decision wisely. And an overpowering ha-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tred of restrictions. (Never once, Herb, for three years to be allowed to leave this Reserve! I've been sweating here for seven weeks, but that is 156 weeks. Christ!) Now I had known, more or less, all these factors before I came here, all these nice rational, statistical factors. But when I asked myself the other night, in the false clarity of the desert moonlight, why I had chosen to come, why really, I still could not answer myself satisfactorily. For of one thing I was still certain, that none of the logical reasons, none of my recognized impulses, would have brought me here singly or combined.

I also, being in the mood, asked myself why I had continued to live with Clarice for five years after I had known quite consciously that I did not love her but felt a positive contempt for her. Betty accounted for part of it, and the usual fear of casting out again on one's own. But I would not have been on my own in any obvious sense: I am sure you know of my love affairs during those five years; I could have married any of three or four worthy women. And I ask myself why it was that the moment Clarice decided once and for all to divorce me—she did the deciding, not me; I don't think you knew that—from that time on I lost my taste for my current inamorata and have not had a real affair since. These questions I was unable to answer; but at least I was seriously asking them of myself: I was willing and able to face the answers.

The key to the answer came from my long-limbed, mildly pretty, efficient, but (I had originally thought) frivolous and banal secretary—Ruth. She is one of those women who, because they do not have an "intellectual" idea in their noodles, are too frequently dismissed as conveniently decorative but not very valuable. And perhaps Ruth really is that. But she has made two or three remarks recently which seem to me to display an intuitive intelligence of a considerable order. Yet they may be merely aptly chosen, conventional observations. It is hard to tell.—She interests me. She has a maxim which I resent but cannot refute: "There are those who get it and those who dish it out; I intend to be on the side of the dishers." (Is this the post-Christian golden rule? It has its own power, you know.) In any case, the other day I was sitting in my cubicle of an office, in front of which Ruth's desk is placed—she services two of us. I had my feet up on the desk in a rather indecorous fashion, and I had laid the book I was reading on my lap while I smoked a cigarette. I suppose I was daydreaming a little. Suddenly Ruth opened the door and entered. I started, picked up the book and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

took my feet off the table-top. Ruth cocked an eye at me and said, "You like to feel guilty, don't you? All I wanted to know was whether you could spare time for a cup of coffee." So we went to the café and had coffee, and didn't even mention her statement or its cause.

But it set me thinking; and the longer I thought about it, the better I liked it. I had always discounted wild, Dostoyevskian notions like that as being too perverse to be true. But now I am not at all sure that frivolous, red-nailed Ruth wasn't right. So long as Clarice had been there to reprove me for my infidelities, I had had them. When her censorship was removed, the infidelities, or any love affairs, at all, lost their spice—the spice which was the guilt that she made me feel about them. And then, having divorced Clarice, I took this job. This job is a sop to my sense of guilt at being white and middle-class, that is to say, one of Ruth's "dishers," a sop because I am participating in an enterprise whose purpose is social justice; at the same time it is a punishment, because of the deprivations I am undergoing; yet the actual luxury of my life and my actual status in the bureaucracy, high but not orthodox, privileged yet not normally restricted, nourishes the guilt which supports it. What it is that causes the sense of guilt in the first place, I suppose Freud could tell me, but I am not going to bother to find out. There are certain indecencies about which one ought not to inquire unless one has to. Social guilt—that is to say, a sense of responsibility toward society—is a good thing to have, and I intend to exploit it in myself. I intend to satisfy it by doing as fine a job as I possibly can; and furthermore I intend to find a worthy European family, say Italian, who are impoverished, and to support them out of my salary. I must confess that the CARE packages we sent to Europe immediately after the war made me feel better than all the fine sentiments I ever gave words to.

I am grateful that I came here. I have been thrown back upon myself in a way that has only benefited me.

We begin work soon. The first trainload of Negroes arrived today, 500 of them. They are going through Intake (the buildings I described in my last letter) and our work, we are told, will commence within a few days. Exactly what we are to do, we will be told tomorrow. I look forward to it eagerly.

ANDY

I read this letter over before putting it in the envelope. That was a mistake. All the excitement about myself which I had felt so keenly sounds rather flat as I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

have put it. There must be a great deal for me yet to discover. As you know, I have never spent much of my energy in intimacies, either with myself or with other people. One gets a facsimile of it when talking about the universal stereotypes of love with a woman. But this desert has thrown me back upon myself; and from your letter I take it you would find my explorations of interest. However, you must not expect many more letters in so tiresome a vein. I will seal and mail this one tonight lest I repent in the morning.

April 10

Dear Herb,

I have not known how to write this letter, though I've tried two or three times in the past week to do it. I'm going to put it in the form of a homily, with illustrations, on the text "There are those who get it and those who dish it out; I intend to be on the side of the dishers."

First, in what context did it occur? It is the motto of a charming young woman (any doubts I may have expressed about her are withdrawn as of now: she is all one could ask for) who is not malicious and does not in the least want to impose her beliefs or herself upon other people. She sends $100 a month to her mother, who is dying of cancer in a county hospital in Pennsylvania. When she told me she was sending the money, I asked her why. "Why?" said Ruth. "I'm disappointed in you to ask me such a thing." "All right, be disappointed but tell me why. She shrugged a little in a humorous way. "She's my mother. And anyway," she added, "we're all dying, aren't we?" The important thing to note about Ruth is—she means it but she doesn't care. Just as she doesn't really care whether you like her clothes or her lovely hair; she does, and you ought to; the loss is yours if you don't. She was reared in a perfectly usual American city, and she has chosen from its unconscious culture the best in custom and attitude.

But she said it here, in the Public Relations division of the Colored Persons Reserve, here where there is as much getting and dishing out as anywhere in the world, where the most important Negro in the Reserve, the President of it, may be in a very real sense considered inferior to our window-washer. The first time O'Doone heard her say it—he had dropped by to talk a while, and Ruth had joined us—he made the sign of the cross in the air between himself and Ruth and backed clear out of the room. He didn't return either. I'm sure he's not religious. I don't know why.

Now what does the statement imply? Primarily, it makes no judgment and does not urge to action. It is unmoral. "There is a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

condition such that some people must inflict pain and others must receive it; since it is impossible to be neutral in this regard and since I like neither to give nor to take injury, I shall choose the path of least resistance—ally myself with the inflictors, not because I like their side and certainly not because I dislike the other side, but only because I myself am least interfered with that way." No regret. No self-deception (*it is impossible to be neutral*). In other words, true resignation—this circumstance is as it is, and it will not and should not be otherwise. There is a certain intensity of joy possible after resignation of this order, greater than we frustrated hopers know. (Where do I fit into this scheme? I think I have discovered one thing about myself from contemplating Ruth's maxim: that is, I want profoundly to be a disher, but my training has been such, or perhaps I am only so weak, that I am incapable of being one with a clear conscience. Consequently I find myself in a halfway position—dishing it out, yes, but at the behest of people I have never seen, and to people I will never know.) Ruth took a job with the NRACP for the only right reason—not for any of my complicated ones nor for the general greed, but because she saw quite clearly that here was one of the very pure instances of getting it and dishing it out. She left a job as secretary to an executive in General Electric for this. I think she gets a certain pleasure from seeing her philosophy so exquisitely borne out by event. Ruth is 27. I think I am in love with her. I am sure she is not in love with me.

Tell me, Herb, does not this maxim ring a bell in you? Can you not recognize, as I do, the rightness of it? This girl has had the courage to put into deliberate words her sense of the inevitable. Do you not admire her for it? And is she not right? She is right enough. If you doubt it, let me tell you what our job here is.

The authorities consider the situation potentially explosive enough to warrant the most elaborate system of censorship I have ever heard of. To begin with, there is a rule that during his first week in the Reserve every Negro may write three letters to persons on the outside. After that period is over, only one letter a month is permitted. Now all letters leaving here during the first week are sent to PR where they are censored and typed in the correct form (on NRACP letterhead); the typed copies are sent on and the originals are filed. The reason for this elaborate system is interesting enough, and probably sound; every endeavor is to be made to discourage any leaking out of adverse reports on conditions in the CPR. There are some fourteen

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

million Negroes in the nation, not all of whom are entirely pleased with the prospect of being relocated; and there are an indeterminate number of Caucasian sympathizers—civil liberties fanatics for the most part—who could cause trouble if any confirmation of their suspicions about the CPR should leak out. We have put out a staggering amount of data on the climatic, agricultural, power production and mining conditions of the region; and we have propagandized with every device in the book. Yet we know well enough how long it takes for propaganda to counteract prejudice, and sometimes how deceptive an apparent propaganda success can be. We are more than grateful that almost the entire news outlet system of the nation is on our side.

Well then, after the three letters of the first week have been typed and sent, the writer's job begins. Every effort is made to discourage the interned Negroes from writing to the outside. For one thing, we keep in our files all personal letters incoming during the first month. Anyone who contines to write to an internee after this month needs to be answered. The filing clerks keep track of the dates, and forward all personal letters to us. (The clerks think we send the letters on to the internees.) We then write appropriate responses to the letters, in the style of the internee as we estimate it from his three letters. We try to be as impersonal as possible, conveying the idea that everything is all right. Why do we not forward the letters to the internees to answer? First of all we do—if the internees request it. They are told that they will receive letters only from those persons whose letters they request to see, and such a request involves yards of red tape. Very few are expected to use the cumbersome mechanism at all. Then, we write the letters for them simply to save ourselves time and trouble. We would have a lot of rewriting to do anyway; this method assures us of complete control and an efficient *modus operandi*. Any outsider Negro who writes too many insistent letters will be, at our request, relocated within a month; we do not want any unnecessary unhappiness to result from the necessarily painful program. Friends and relatives are to be reunited as fast as possible. Whole communities are to be relocated together, to avoid whatever wrenches in personal relationships we can avoid.

Is not this getting it and dishing it out on a fine scale? All for very good reasons, I know. But then, is it not conceivable that there are always good reasons for the old crapperoo? Sometimes I feel absolutistic enough to say—if it's this bad, for any ultimate

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

reason whatsoever, then to hell with it. After which sentiment, comes the gun at the head. But then reason reinstates my sense of the relativity of values, and on I go writing a letter to Hector Jackson of South Carolina explaining that I've been so busy putting up a chickenhouse and plowing that I haven't had a chance to write but I hope to see you soon. (I doubt if I will.)

ANDY

I forgot to mention—I have a special job, which is to censor the letters of all the clerical personnel in PR. One of my duties is to censor any reference to the censorship! A strange state of affairs. None of them know that this job is mine; most think the censor must be some Mail Department employee. I must say you look at some people with new eyes after reading their correspondence.

I need hardly say, but if there is any doubt I will say, that this letter is absolutely confidential. How much of our system will become publicly known, I cannot guess; but naturally I don't want to jump the official gun in this regard.

April 12

Dear Herb,

Let me tell you about the strange adventure I had last evening. I am still not quite sure what to make of it.

Immediately after work I picked up a few sandwiches and a pint of whiskey, and walked out into the desert on one of my hikes. One more meal with the jabber of the café and one more of those good but always good in the same way dinners, and I felt I should come apart at the seams. (Another thing I have learned about myself—I am ill adapted to prison life.) I had no goal in view. I intended to stroll.

But I found myself heading generally in the direction of the hill from which I had looked over the Tehuala Valley and the city of CPR Intake buildings. I came across nothing particularly interesting in a natural history way, so that by early dusk I was near to the hill; I decided to climb it again and see what I could see.

The first thing I saw, in the difficult light of dusk, was a soldier with a gun standing at the foot of the hill. I came around a large clump of cactus, and there he was, leaning on his rifle. He immediately pointed it at me, and told me to go back where I belonged. I objected that I had climbed this hill before and I could see no reason why I shouldn't do it again. He replied that he didn't see any reason either, but I couldn't just the same; they were going to put up another fence to keep people like me away. I cursed, at the whole situation; if I had dared I would have cursed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

him too, for he had been rude as only a guard with a gun can be. Then, before I left, I pulled out my pint and took a slug of it. The guard was a changed man.

"Christ," he said, "give me a pull."

"I should give you a pull."

"Come on," he said, "I ain't had a drop since I came to this hole. They won't even give us beer."

"All right," I replied, "if you'll tell me what the hell's going on around here."

He made me crouch behind a Joshua tree, and he himself would not look at me while he talked. I asked him why all the precautions.

"They got a searchlight up top the hill, with machine guns. They sweep the whole hill all the time. They can see plain as day in the dark. They keep an eye on us fellows down here. I know. I used to run the light."

"I haven't seen any light," I said.

He glanced at me with scorn.

"It's black," he said. "They cut down all the bushes all around the top part of that hill. Anybody comes up in the bare place—pttt! *Any*body. Even a guard."

"I still don't see any light."

"Man, it's black light. You wear glasses and shine this thing and you can see better than you can with a regular light searchlight. It's the stuff. We used to shoot rabbits with it. The little bastards never knew what hit them!"

I didn't want to appear simple, so I didn't ask any more questions about the black light. He was an irascible fellow, with a gun and a knife, and he had drunk most of the bottle already.

"Why do you let me stay at all?" I asked.

"Can't see good in the dusk. Not even them can't."

I couldn't think of anything more to say. I felt overwhelmed.

"I used to be guard on the railroad they got inside. Say, have they got a system. Trains from the outside go through an automatic gate. All the trainmen get on the engine and drive out. Then we come up through another automatic gate and hook on and drag it in. Always in the daytime. Anybody tried to hop train, inside or out, pttt! Air-conditioned box cars made out of steel. Two deep they come. Never come in at night."

"Are you married?" I asked.

"Ain't nobody married up front, huh?" I didn't answer. "There ain't, ain't there?"

"No, but there could be if anybody felt like it."

"Well, there ain't even a woman inside. Not a damn one. They let us have all the nigger women we want. Some ain't so bad. Most of them fight a lot."

He smashed the pint bottle on a rock nearby.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Why didn't you bring some real liquor, god damn you?" he said in a low voice full of violence. "Get the hell back home where you belong. Get out of here. It's getting dark. I'll shoot the guts out of you too. Bring me something I can use next time, huh? Get going.—Stay under cover," he shouted after me. "They're likely to get you if they spot you. They can't miss if it's dark enough."

The last I heard of him he was coughing and spitting and swearing. I was as disgusted as scared, and I must confess I was scared stiff.

I walked homeward bound, slowly recovering my emotional balance, trying to understand what had happened to me with that guard, the meaning of what he had told me. For some absurd reason the tune "In the Gloaming, O, My Darling" kept running through my head in the idiotic way tunes will, so that I was unable to concentrate intelligently upon the situation. (I wonder why that tune business happens.)

I heard a sound at some distance to my left. I stopped, suddenly and inexplicably alarmed to the point of throbbing temples and clenched fists. I saw a slim figure in brown among the cactus; and then, as the figure approached, I could see it was a young woman. She did not see me, but her path brought her directly to where I was standing. I did not know whether to accost her at a distance or to let her come upon me where I stood. By the time I had decided not to accost her, I could see it was Ruth.

"Why, Ruth!" I cried, with all the emotion of relief and gratified surprise in my voice, and perhaps something more. "What are you doing here?"

She started badly, then seeing who it was she hurried up to me and to my intense surprise took my arms and put them around her body.

"Andy," she said, "I am so glad to see you. Some good angel must have put you here for me."

I squeezed her, we kissed, a friendly kiss, then she drew away and shook herself. She had almost always called me Mr. Dixon before; there was a real affection in her "Andy."

"What's the matter?" I asked her. "Where have you been?"

"I didn't know you took walks too."

"Oh, yes. It's one way to keep from going nuts.'

She laughed a little, and squeezed my arm. I could not refrain from kissing her again, and this time it was not just a friendly kiss.

"Where did you go?" I asked again.

"To that hill. I went up there a couple of times before. There

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was a guard there wanted to lay me."

We didn't speak for a few moments.

"I think he almost shot me for giving him the brush-off. I didn't look back when I left, but I heard him click his gun. You don't know how glad I was to see you."

So we kissed again, and this time it was serious.

"Wait a minute," she said, "wait a minute."

She unlocked her arm from mine, and we continued on our way, not touching.

"I had some trouble with a guard too," I said. "I wonder why they're so damned careful to keep us away."

"Mine told me they didn't want us to get any funny ideas. He said things aren't what they seem to be in there."

"Didn't you ask him what he meant?"

"Sure. That's when he said I'd better shut up and let him lay me, or else he'd shoot me. So I walked off. I'm not going to call on *him* again."

I put my arm around her—I can't tell you how fond I was of her at that moment, of her trim, poised body, her courage, her good humor, her delightful rich voice and laughter—but she only kissed me gently and withdrew.

"I want to keep my head for a while, darling," she said.

I knew what she meant. We walked on in silence, hand in hand. It was moonlight. This time if I was lightheaded I knew why.

When we were about half a mile from our buildings, we came across O'Doone, also returning from a walk.

"Well," he said brightly, "it *is* a nice moon, isn't it?"

It wouldn't do to say that we had met by accident; I was embarrassed, but Ruth's fine laugh cleared the air for me.

"Nicest I ever saw," she said.

"Did you ever walk up that hill," I asked him, "where you can see out over the valley?"

"Once," he said in a surprisingly harsh voice. "I'd rather play chess."

So we went into one of the recreation rooms, and O'Doone beat me at three games of chess. Ruth sat by, knitting—a sweater for a cousin's baby. We talked little, but comfortably. It would have been a domestic scene, if it had not been for the fifty or sixty other people in the room.

Herb, what does it all mean?

ANDY

April 20

Dear Herb,

(This is a *Prior* Script. If all goes well you will receive this letter from Ruth's cousin, who will be informed by O'Doone's sister to forward it to you. O'Doone's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sister will also send you instructions on how to make the invisible ink visible. When I wrote the letter, I was in a self-destructive frame of mind; I was prepared to take all the certainly drastic consequences that would come from its being read by someone of authority. But O'Doone's invisible ink (what a strange fellow to have brought a quart of it here! He said he had brought it only to play mysterious letter-games with his nephew—*I* wonder) and Ruth's baby sweater, upon the wrapping of which I write this, combined to save me. If the authorities catch *this*, I don't care what happens. It takes so long to write lightly enough in invisible ink for no pen mark to show on the paper, that I doubt if I will have the patience to use it often. Most of my letters will be innocuous in regular ink. I may add an invisible note or two, between the lines, in the margin, at the end. O'Doone says it's not any of the ordinary kinds and if we're careful the authorities are not likely to catch us. O'Doone is strange. He refused to take this whole ink matter for anything more than a big joke—as though we were digging a tunnel under a house, O'Doone pretending we are just tunneling in a straw stack to hide our marbles, myself trying to protest (but being laughed at for my lapse in taste) that we are really undermining a house in order to blow it up. Which perhaps we are. In any event, I don't have the energy left to rewrite this letter; I'll just copy it, invisibly.)

I cannot tell you how shocked I was to discover the familiar, black, censor's ink over five lines in your last letter. The censor censored! I had not thought of that. In my innocence I had thought that we writers in the higher brackets could be trusted to be discreet. One would think I was still a loyal subscriber to the *Nation*, I was so naive. But no—I am trusted to censor the letters of inferiors (I suspect my censorship is sample-checked by someone), but my own letters are themselves inspected and their dangerous sentiments excised. And, irony of ironies! your own references to the fact that my letters were censored were themselves blacked out.

Who is it that does this? The head of PR here? That's a strange way to make him waste his time. One of his assistants? Then the head must censor the assistant's letters. And the chief board of the NRACP censors the head's letters? And the President theirs? And God his? And———?

Which is the more imprisoned—the jailer who thinks he is free and is not, or the prisoner who knows the precise boundaries of his liberty and accepting them explores and uses all the world he has?

I am a jailer who knows he is

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

not free. I am a prisoner who does not know the limits of his freedom. And all this I voluntarily submitted to in the name of a higher freedom. Ever since my adolescence, when the New Deal was a faith, liberty has been one of the always repeated, never examined articles of my creed. Well, I have been examining liberty recently, and she's a pure fraud.

One thing I have learned—you don't just quietly put yourself on the side of Ruth's dishers, you become one of them yourself; and a disher *has* to dish it out, he cannot help it at all; and he pays for it. Or maybe I am only paying for my guilt-making desire to be a more important disher than I am.

Ruth was surprised at my distress upon receiving your censored letter. She only shrugged. What had I expected, after all? It was inevitable, it was a necessity. That's the key word, Herb—Necessity. Not liberty, Necessity. True liberty is what the prisoner has, because he accepts Necessity. That's the great thing, Herb, to recognize and accept Necessity.

I've slowly been working toward a realization of this. I think my decision to work in the NRACP came from recognizing the social necessity of it. The Negro problem in America was acute and was insoluble by any liberal formula; this solution gives dignity and independence to the Negroes; it staves off the Depression by the huge demand for manufactured products, for transportation, for the operations of the NRACP itself; but perhaps most important of all, it establishes irrevocably in the American people's mind the wisdom and rightness of the government; for if capitalism must go (as it must) it should be replaced peaceably by a strong and wise planned state. Such a state we are proving ourselves to be. Very well. I accepted this. But what I forgot was that *I*, I, the individual, I, Andrew Dixon, must personally submit to the stringencies of necessity. The relics of the New Deal faith remained to clutter up my new attitude. This experience, coming when and as it did, particularly coming when Ruth's courageous wisdom was nearby to support me, has liberated me (I hope) into the greater freedom of the Prisoner of Necessity.

Such are my pious prayers at least. I cannot say I am sure I fully understand all the strictures of necessity. I *can* say I do not enjoy those I understand. But pious I will remain.

Remember the days when we thought we could *change* Necessity? Democracy and all that? How much older I feel!

ANDY

May 1

Mary my dear:

Please let me apologize—sin-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cerely too, Mary—for having neglected you so cruelly for the past months. Herb tells me you are quite put out, and well you might be. I can find no excuses for it, but this I will stoutly maintain—it was not a question of hostility or indifference to you, my dear. Actually I have been going through something of a crisis, as Herb may have been telling you.

It has something to do with the desert, and something to do with the NRACP, and a lot to do with the charming young woman whose picture I enclose. She is Ruth Cone. We are getting married in a couple of Sundays—Mother's Day. Why Mother's Day, I really don't know. But she wants it, so there's no help. The details of our plighting troth might amuse you.

A couple of evenings ago I was playing chess in the recreation room with a man named O'Doone, my only friend here. Ruth was sitting beside us knitting some rompers for a cousin's baby. From time to time we would chat a little; it was all very comfortable and unromantic. O'Doone, between games, went to the toilet. When he had left, Ruth said to me with a twinkle in her eye, "Andy darling, don't you see what I am doing?" I replied, "Why yes, my sweet, knitting tiny garments. Is it—?" And we both laughed heartily. It was a joke, you see, a mild comfortable little joke, and no one would have thought of it a second time except that when we had finished laughing it was no longer a joke. Her face became very sober, and I am sure mine did too. I said, "Do you want children, Ruth?" "Yes," she replied. "Do you want to have my children?" "Yes," she said again, without looking at me. Then with the most charming conquest of modesty that you can imagine, she turned her serious little face to me, and we very lightly kissed. O'Doone had returned by then. "Well," he said in a bright way, "do I interrupt?" "Not at all," I answered; "we have just decided to get married." He burbled a little, in caricature of the overwhelmed, congratulating friend, pumped our hands, and asked us when we were marrying. "I don't know," I said. "Why not tomorrow?" "Oh no," said Ruth severely, "how can I assemble my trousseau?" At which O'Doone went off into a braying laugh, and we set up the chess pieces. "Bet you five to one," he said, "I win this game in less than sixty moves." I wouldn't take his bet. It took him about forty moves to beat me.

And thus did Dixon and Cone solemnly vow to share their fortunes.

It's the first marriage in PR. Everybody will attend. The chief promised me Monday off and temporary quarters in one of the guest suites. We are to get a two-room

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

apartment in the new dormitory that is nearly completed. Such privacy and spaciousness will make us the envy of the whole community. I'm sure there will be a spate of marriages as soon as the dormitory is completed. We will not be married by a holy man, partly because neither of us believes in it and partly because there isn't one of any kind on the premises. (I wondered why those detailed questions about religious beliefs on our application forms.) There was a little trouble at first about who was authorized to marry people here. The PR chief, as the only person permitted to leave the place, went out and got himself authorized to do it legally. I think he rather fancies himself in the capacity of marrier. He runs to paternalism.

Ruth urges me, Mary—she assumes, quite rightly, that I have not done it already—to tell you some of the homely details of life here. Of our sleeping rooms, the less said the better. The beds are comfortable period. We live quite communally, but very well. There's a fine gymnasium, with swimming pool and play fields attached—tennis, baseball, squash, fencing, everything but golf. There's the best library (surely the best!) in the world on American Negro affairs, and a reasonably good one of modern literature. We have comfortable working quarters—with a long enough working day to be sure. There is a fine desert for us to walk around in, and I have come to need an occasional stroll in the desert for spiritual refreshment. And we eat handsomely, except for vegetables. In fact, the only complaint that I have of the cooking is the monotony of its excellence—roast, steak, chop, stew. Never, or seldom, liver and kidneys and omelettes and casseroles. And always frozen vegetables. Well, probably the Negroes will be producing plenty of vegetables within a few weeks. There's lots of liquor of every kind. There is a sort of department store where one can buy everything one needs and most of the luxuries one could want in this restricted life. There's a movie a week—double-feature with news and cartoon—and bridge or poker every day. A microcosmic plenitude.

Well, as for the rest of our routine life here, I can think of nothing interesting enough to mention. We work and avoid work, backbite, confide, suspect. It's a bureaucratic existence, no doubt of that.

Will this epistle persuade you to forgive me?

Now you must write to me—soon.

Devotedly yours,

ANDY

(*In invisible ink*)

O'Doone, who sometimes gives his opinions very obliquely, came

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to me today with some disturbing figures. He wasn't in the least jaunty about them, and I must confess that I am not either.

According to *Time,* which seems to know more about the CPR than we do, there have been about 50,000 Negroes interned already, and these 50,000 include nearly all the wealthy and politically powerful Negroes in the nation (including an objectionable white-supremacy Senator one of whose great-great grandmothers turns out to have been black). The leaders were interned first, reasonably enough, to provide the skeleton of government and system in the new State which they are to erect. *But,* O'Doone points out, we have yet to receive from them a request for letters from an outsider; and if any Negroes at all are going to make such requests, it must surely be these, the most important, the least afraid of red tape. (He also pointed out that not one of the entertainers or athletes of prominence has been interned. That, I'm afraid, is all too easily explained.) You see, says O'Doone, you see? But he didn't say Why? to me, and I'm glad he didn't for I can't even guess why.

Another statistic he had concerned the CPR itself. We all know that the figures on natural resources in the CPR are exaggerated. Grossly. Fourteen million people cannot possibly live well in this area, and O'Doone demonstrated that fact to me most convincingly. The Negro problem, economically, in the U. S. has been that they provided a larger cheap labor market than consumer market. Now the false stimulus of capitalizing their beginnings here will keep American industry on an even keel for years and years, but after that what? O'Doone bowed out at that point, but I think I can press the point a little further. They will provide a market for surplus commodities, great enough to keep the pressures of capitalism from blowing us sky-high, meanwhile permitting the transition to a planned State to take place. Very astute, I think, very astute indeed.

June 12

Dear Herb,

Why I have not written, you ought to be able to guess. I will not pretend to any false ardors about Ruth. She is wise and winning as a woman, and everything one could ask for as a wife. I love her dearly. She has not read very widely or profoundly, but I think she is going to do something about that, soon. We are very happy together and I think we shall continue to be happy during the difficult years to come. What more can I say?

Why are happiness and contentment and the sense of fulfill-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ment so hard to write about? I can think of nothing to say, and besides Ruth is just coming in from tennis (it's 9:30 Sunday morning).

10 *p. m.*

Ruth has gone to bed, so I will continue in another vein.

I have been discovering that the wells of pity, which have lain so long locked and frozen in my eyes, are thawed in me now. I am enclosing a letter which came in from a Negress in Chicago to her lover, in the CPR, and his response. It is the first letter from inside, except for the usual three during the first week, that I have read. Apparently a few have been coming out now and then, but this is my first one. I cannot tell you how I pitied both these unhappy people. When Ruth read them, she said, "My, what a mean man! I hope he has to collect garbage all his life." I cannot agree with her. I think his little note betrays an unhappiness as great as the woman's, and even more pitiable for being unrecognized, unappreciated. Judge for yourself. I can think of nothing to add.

ANDY

*Honey dear child, why don't you write to me? Don't you even remember all those things you told me you'd do no matter what? And you're not even in jail, you just in that place where we all going to go to sooner or later. O I sure hope they take me there with you. I can't live without you. But I don't even know who to ask to go there with you. I went to the policeman and they said they didn't know nothing about it. I don't know what to do. You don't know how I ache for you honey. It's just like I got a tooth pulled out but it ain't no tooth it's worse, and there is no dentist for it neither. There's a fellow at the store keeps bothering me now and again, but I assure him I don't want him I got a man. I thought I had a man, you, but I don't hear nothing from you. Maybe you got something there, I don't see how you could do it not after those things you said, but if you have tell me so I can go off in some hole and die. I don't want this Lee Lawson, he's no good, it's you I want, sweetheart, you tell me it's all right. I got to hear from you or I'll just die.*

*Dear——,*

*I've been so busy baby, you wouldn't believe how busy I've been. You'll be coming here pretty soon and then you'll feel better too. It's nice here. We'll get along fine then. You tell that guy to leave you be. You're my gal. Tell him I said so.*

*Yours truly,*

———

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(*In invisible ink*)

I didn't include these letters because I thought they were in the Heloise-Abelard class, but because I wanted to say something about them, and also because they gave me more invisible space.

The man's response came to us already typed. That very much astonished me, and O'Doone, when I told him, let fly a nasty one. "I suppose," he said, "they have a couple of writers in there writing a few letters in place of the Negroes, which we then relay. Complicated, isn't it?" Not complicated, upsetting. Devastating. What if it were true? (And I must say this letter has an air more like the PR rewrite-formula than like a real letter.) Then *none* of the Negroes would have even a filtered connection with the outside world. Why? Why fool even us? Is there no end to the deception and doubt of this place?

O'Doone posed another of his puzzles yesterday. He read in the current PR weekly bulletin that the CPR has been shipping whole trainloads of leather goods and canned meats to China and Europe for relief purposes, under the government's supervision of course. O'Doone came into my office at once, waving the bulletin and chortling. "How do you like it?" he cried. "Before we get a carrot out of them the Chinese get tons of meat." Then a sudden light seemed to dawn on his face. "Where did all the cattle come from?"

A strange thing happened: O'Doone's intelligent, sensitive face collapsed. The great domed forehead remained almost unwrinkled, but his features looked somehow like one of those children's rubber faces which collapse when you squeeze them. No anguish, no anxiety. Only collapse. He left without a word. I wish he had never come here with that news.

Last night I lay awake till three or four o'clock. I could hear trucks and trains rumbling occasionally throughout the night—entering and leaving the Reserve. But that guard I met at the foot of the hill told me that they only bring internees in the daytime. Are those shipments? How can it be? Sometimes I am sick at heart with doubt and uncertainty.

I dreamt last night that I was a Gulliver, lying unbound and unresisting on the ground while a thousand Lilliputians, all of them black, ate at me. I would not write the details of that dream even in invisible ink. Not even in plain water.

July 4

Dear Herb,

Hail Independence Day! Some of the overgrown kids around here are shooting off firecrackers. No one is working. It is all very pleasant. I suppose March 20 will be

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the Independence Day of the new Negro nation—the day when the first trainload arrived. How long ago that seems already. I do not think I have ever been through so much in so short a time. And now for the real news.

Ruth is pregnant! Amazing woman, she remains outwardly as humorous and self-contained as ever. No one else knows her condition, because she wants to avoid as much as possible of the female chatter that goes with pregnancy. She insists upon playing tennis still. Yet she is not all calmness and coolness; when we are lying in bed together before going to sleep, she croons little nonsense hymns to pregnancy in my ear, and yesterday afternoon at the office she walked into my cubicle, up to where I was sitting very solemnly, and placed my hand over her womb. Then she kissed me with a sort of unviolent passion such as I have never known before in my life. I tell you, she's a wonderful woman.

How miraculous is conception and growth! I no more understand such things than I really understand about the stars and their rushings. One event follows another, but I'm sure I don't know why. You get back to an archaic awe, if you permit yourself to, realizing that you yourself have started off a chain of miracles. I never had a sense of littleness when observing the naked heavens, of man's puniness, of my own nothingness. Perhaps it was a fear of that feeling which for so long prevented me from looking upwards at all. I mentioned my reaction to O'Doone on one of the first occasions of our meeting; he nodded and said, "But is not a man more complex than a star, and in every way but one that we know of, more valuable?" What he said remains with me yet; and when I am presented with the vastness of the stars and the forces which operate within them, I am impressed and excited enough but I am not depressed by the imagined spectacle. Their bigness does not make me little. My own complexity does not make them simple. Man is no longer the center of the universe perhaps, but neither is anything else. That I have learned.

But when I am presented with the proof of the powers that men (and myself) possess, then I still feel a little off balance. When Clarice was pregnant with Betty, I had no such feeling. I felt annoyed chiefly. But now, in this desert, in the CPR, I have been sent back at last to fundamentals, to the sources of things; and I realize fully how unaccountable is birth of life. Ruth, who never departed far from the sources, is less embarrassed in admitting her sense of mystery.

One thing I am going to teach this child, if it can be taught any-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thing: that the humane tradition has been tried and found wanting. It's over, finished, kaput. A new era of civilization commences. Kindness and freedom—once they were good for something, but no more. *Put yourself in his place*—never. Rather, fight to stay where you are. I think we are entering upon an age of reason and mystery. Reason which accepts and understands the uttermost heights and depths of human power, man's depravity and his nobility; and, understanding these, dares use them toward a great and future goal, the goal of that stern order which is indispensable to the fullest development of man. Mystery toward all that is not explainable, which is a very great deal. Rationalism failed, for it asserted that everything was ultimately explainable. We know better. We know that to destroy a man's sense of mystery is to cut him off at one of the sources of life. Awe, acceptance, faith—these are wonderful sources of power and fulfillment. I have discovered them. My child shall never forget them.

ANDY

(*In invisible ink*)

I have put the gun to my temple, Herb, I have pointed the knife at my heart. But my nerve failed me. There were a few days when I was nearly distracted. My division chief told me to stay home till I looked better, but I dared not. I think it was only Ruth's pregnancy that saved me. My newly awakened sense of mystery, plus my powers of reason, have saved me. This is the third letter I have written you in a week, but I knew the others were wild and broken, and I was not sure at all that I was physically able to write in such a manner as to avoid detection.

It came to a head, for me, two weeks ago. O'Doone entered my office, his face looking bright and blasted. He dropped a booklet on my desk and left after a few comments of no importance. The booklet was an anthropologist's preliminary report on certain taboos among American Negroes. The fellow had been interviewing them in Intake. There was nothing of special interest about it that I could see, except that it was written in the past tense.

I expected O'Doone to reclaim the booklet any day. For some reason he had always done the visiting to me, not I to him. He was very restless, and I am slothful. But a week passed, and no O'Doone. I did not meet him in the café nor in the recreation room. I went to his own room, but he did not answer. The next day I went to his office, and his secretary told me he had not shown up for two days. I returned to his room. It was locked. The janitor unlocked it for me. When I entered I saw him lying

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dead on his bed. "Well, old boy," I said to drive the janitor away, I don't know why, "feeling poorly?" He had drunk something. There was a glass on the table by his bed. There was no note. His face was repulsive. (That is a mystery I have learned to respect, how hideous death is.) He was cold, and somehow a little sticky to the touch. I covered his face with a towel, and sat down. I knew I should call someone, but I did not want to. I knew the janitor would remember letting me in, and my staying too long. Yet I felt that there was something I must do. What it was I could not remember, something important. It took me an eternity to remember—the invisible ink. I knew where he had kept it. It was not there. I looked throughout his room, and it was simply gone. I left the room.

I still did not notify anyone of his suicide. I was not asking myself why he had done it. Or perhaps I was only shouting Where's the ink? in a loud voice to cover up the little question Why? I went to our rooms and straight to the liquor shelf. I took down the Scotch and poured myself a stiff one, and drank. It was horrible. I spat it out, cursing; then I recognized the odor. O'Doone had come over, poured out the Scotch (I hope he enjoyed it himself) and filled the bottle with the invisible ink. At that, I broke down in the most womanish way, and cried on the bed (never ask Why? Why? Why?).

Ruth found me there some time later. I told her everything that had happened, and she immediately pulled me together. She had the sense to know I had been acting more oddly than was wise. She notified the right people, and O'Doone was disposed of. No one asked me any embarrassing questions, and no official mention of O'Doone's end was made anywhere.

I must continue this on a birthday card.

(*In invisible ink, on a large, plain Happy Birthday card to Mary*)

I had still not allowed myself to ask why he had done it, but Ruth put the thing in a short sentence. "He was too soft-hearted to stand it here." She was right; he was a Christian relic. He knew more than he could bear. I resolved to go that very evening again to the hill where the black searchlight threatened the night.

Some sandwiches. Four half-pints of whiskey. A hunting-knife (a foolish gesture, I know). Plain drab clothes. The long walk in the still hot, late-afternoon sun. Sunset. The huge, sudden twilight. And I was within sight of a guard (not the same one I had seen before) standing by the new fence at the foot of the hill.

I crept up toward him under

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cover of brush and cactus, till I was close enough to toss a half-pint of whiskey in his direction. His bored, stupid face immediately became animated by the most savage emotions. He leveled his gun and pointed it in my general direction. He could not see me, however, and rather than look for me he crouched, eyes still searching the underbrush, to reach for the bottle. He drained it in five minutes.

"Throw me some more," he whispered loudly.

"Put the gun down."

I aimed my voice away from him, hoping that he would not spot me. I was lying flat beneath a large clump of sagebrush. There was a Joshua tree nearby, and several cactus plants. He pointed the gun at one of the stalks of cactus, and crept up toward it. Then he suddenly stopped, I don't know why, and walked back to his post.

"What yer want?" he asked.

I tossed out another bottle. He jumped again; then he got it and drank it.

"What's going on in there?" I asked him.

"They're fixing up the niggers," he said. "You know as much about it as I do."

He began to sing "O Susannah" in a sentimental voice. It was beginning to get too dark for my safety. I was desperate.

I tossed out another bottle, only not so far this time. When he leaned for it, I said very clearly, "You look like a butcher."

He deliberately opened the bottle and drank off half of it.

"Butcher, huh? Butcher?" he laid down his gun and took his villainous knife out. "I'm no butcher. I won't have nothing to do with the whole slimy mess. I won't eat them. No, sir, you can do that for me. But I can do a little carving, I think. No butcher, you son of a bitch. You dirty prying niggereating son of a bitch. I'll learn you to call me a butcher."

He was stalking the cactus again. He lunged forward at it, and with much monotonous cursing and grunting dealt with it murderously. In the meantime, I crawled out on the other side of the sagebrush and ran for it. He never shot at me. Nothing happened, except that I too ran full tilt into a cactus, and had to walk hours in agony of flesh as well as of spirit. I vomited and retched till I thought I would be unable to walk further.

I must continue this letter some other way.

ANDY

*(In invisible ink, on the papers wrapping another sweater for Ruth's cousin's baby)*

I told Ruth nothing of what I had learned. Not even *her* great sense of inevitable could survive

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

such a shock, I think. Yet sometimes it seems to me that she must surely know it all. I do not want to know whether she knows. Could I support it if she did?

It was more painful pulling the cactus needles out than it had been acquiring them. But she removed them all, bathed the little wounds with alcohol and put me to bed. The next morning I awoke at seven and insisted upon going to work. I sat all day in my office, eating crackers and drinking milk. I didn't accomplish a thing. It was that day my chief told me to take it easy for a while. I was in a sort of stupor for a couple of days; yet I insisted, to everyone's consternation, on going to work. I accomplished nothing, and I intended to accomplish nothing. It was just that I could not tolerate being alone. In fact, today was the first day I have been alone for more than five minutes since I returned from the walk. But today I have regained a kind of composure, or seeming of composure, which for a time I despaired of ever possessing again. And I know that by the time I have given shape enough to my thoughts to put them on this paper for you to read, I shall have gained again a peace of mind. To have you to write to, Herb, that is the great thing at this point. Without you there, I do not know what I would have done.

So much for my emotions. My thinking, my personal philosophy, has gone through at least as profound an upheaval as they.

In the chaos of my mind, in which huge invisible chunks of horror hit me unexpectedly from unexpected angles again and again, my first coherent and sensible idea came in the form of a question. "Why did they make it possible for me to find out what has been going on?" For I finally realized that it was no fluke that I had discovered it. Or O'Doone either. Or anyone with the suspicions and the courage for it. When the atom bombs were being produced, the whole vast undertaking was carried off without a single leak to the outside. Therefore, if I had been able in so simple a way to find out what had been going on in the CPR, it was only because they didn't care. They could have stopped me.

Then I thought: invisible ink is scarcely new in the history of things. Perhaps they have been reading my correspondence with you all along and will smile at this letter as they have smiled at others; or perhaps they haven't taken the trouble to read it, because they simply don't care.

Perhaps the authorities not only did not care if we gradually found out, but wanted us to.

Why should they want us to? Why, if that were true, should they have put so formidable a system of apparent preventatives?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Double fences, censorship, lies, etc., etc.?

The only answer that makes sense is this. They want the news gradually and surreptitiously to sift out to the general population —illegally, in the form of hideous rumors to which people can begin to accustom themselves. After all, everyone knew generally that something like the atom bomb was being manufactured. Hiroshima was not the profound and absolute shock in 1945 that it would have been in 1935, and a good deal of the preparation for its general acceptance was rumor. It is in the people's interest that the CPR function as it does function, and especially so that they can pretend that they have nothing to do with it. The experience of the Germans in the Jew-extermination camps demonstrated that clearly enough. It would do no good for me to go around crying out the truth about NRACP, because few would believe me in the first place and my suppression would only give strength to the rumors, which were required and planned for anyhow.

But I still had to set myself the task of answering Why? What drove them (whoever they are) to the decision to embark upon a course which was not only revolutionary but dangerous? I accepted the NRACP as inevitable, as Necessity; there remained only the task of trying to understand wherein lay the mystery of the Necessity and of adjusting myself to the situation. The individual, cruel, wasteful, useless, and mysterious. The leader is he who sees and points out the course of history, that we may pursue that course with least pain. It is odd that we Americans have no such leader; what we have is committees and boards and bureau heads who collectively possess leadership and who direct our way almost impersonally. There is nothing whatsoever that I myself would like so much as to be one of those wise, courageous, anonymous planners. The wisdom I think that I possess. But in place of courage I have a set of moral scruples dating from an era when man was supposed to have a soul and when disease took care of overpopulation. The old vestigial values of Christianity must be excised in the people as they are being excised in me. The good and the lucky are assisting at the birth of a new age. The weak and unfit are perishing in the death of an old. Which shall it be for us?

For my own part, I think I am in a state of transition, from being one of the unfit to being one of the fit. I feel it. I will it. There are certain external evidences of it. For example, I was face to face with the truth at the end of April, but instead of acknowledging what I saw I turned to my love for Ruth. Yet that refusal to recog-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nize the truth did not long survive the urgings of my sense of necessity. And I remember, when being confronted with piecemeal evidences of the truth, that I was unable to explain a number of them. You know, Herb, how accomplished a rationalizer I can be; yet this time I did not even *try* to rationalize about many of the facts.

—It is dawn outside. I cannot read this letter over, so I am not entirely sure how incoherent it is. I feel that I have said most of what I wanted to say. I am not very happy. I think I shall sleep the better for having written this. I eat nothing but bread and fruit and milk. A bird is singing outside; he is making the only sound in the world. I can see the hill which separates us from the Intake buildings. It's a pleasant hill, rather like an arm extending out from the valley sides, and I am glad it is there. I am cold now, but in three hours it will be warm and in five hours hot. I am rambling I know. But suddenly all my energy has leaked out. I walk to the door to see Ruth so happily sleeping, mysteriously replenishing life from this nightly portion of death, and I think of that baby she is bearing and will give birth to. If it were not for her and the baby, I am sure I should have gone mad. Is not that a mystery, Herb? Our child shall be fortunate; it is the first conscious generation of each new order in whom the greatest energy is released. There are splendid things ahead for our child.

It is not my fault. I did not know what I was doing. How could I have known? What can I do now?

I stare at the lightening sky, exhausted. I do not know why I do not say farewell, and go to bed. Perhaps it is because I do not want to hear that little lullaby that sings in my ears whenever I stop: I have eaten human flesh, my wife is going to have a baby.

Remember, back in the simple days of the Spanish Civil War, when Guernica was bombed, we speculated all one evening what the worst thing in the world could be? This is the worst thing in the world, Herb. I tell you, the worst. After this, nothing.

Perhaps if I lay my head against Ruth's breast and put her hands over my ears I can go to sleep. Last night I recited Housman's "Loveliest of trees, the cherry now," over and over till I went to sleep, not because I like it particularly but because I could think of nothing else to recite.

My wife is going to have a baby, my wife is going to have a baby, my wife is going to have a baby.

Bless you,

ANDY

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

*Each year, two people from each of the clans went out to the plain of The Power to do homage, and none had yet returned. . . .*

# TWO IN HOMAGE

*by Kit Reed*

IN A TIME BEFORE ANY OF THEM could remember, evil days fell on that land, and in those evil days a Power came and the elders (who were timorous and hard-pressed for food and goods) bargained with it, and The Power fell into the land and dwelt there and the land prospered. But The Power demanded payment for this prosperity, and each year two people from each of the clans went out to the plain of The Power to do homage, and none returned.

Some still believed that at one homage-time a Destroyer would march forth to free them, but each year the sky grew redder and the air grew hotter, each year The Power grew more voracious, and some even said the Devil's own hot fingers gripped the land.

Stephen felt soft fingers at his elbow and turned sharply. It was Michael. His hair was thick with leaves and filth and there were smears at the corners of his mouth. His face was beautiful.

Playfully, Michael touched his brother's sleeve again, and batted at it like a small cat with a new plaything. He raised his other hand and then remembered. He uncurled his fingers and offered Stephen a soft blob of mud. There was a coin embedded in it.

"You," he said gently.

"Will you come on!" Stephen took the squashy thing from him and threw it into the brush. Before it hit the ground Michael had forgotten it.

"The Menzies will send two strong men. Why they send a man with a half-witted brother to do homage in the name of Craig is beyond me. *Will you come on?*" Stephen yanked at the smiling idiot and got him started down to the place set for the meeting.

He reached the clearing just as a short, thick-shouldered man came through the trees on the other side.

Stephen raised his fist in the sign of the hammer and spoke: "Since angel fell."



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The stranger slurred his answer in a deep, rough voice: "Golden coin."

"You're Menzies?" Stephen asked, glad Michael had stopped to rummage through a pile of brush a few feet behind him.

"I know the password, don't I? You're Craig." Menzies stepped aside and let his younger, slighter partner through the brush to the clearing. "Jaqueline," he said disgusted.

Stephen gestured to the bumbling, puppylike Michael, who had just pounded out of the woods. "Michael," he said with scorn.

Menzies stared past Stephen, straining toward the woods. He made a business of walking over to the trees and peering between them.

"What are you doing?" Stephen asked sharply.

"Looking for the Destroyer." Menzies took one last mock-look at the woods. "I thought sure you'd brought the Destroyer." He guffawed.

Stephen looked at him sullenly. "Michael and I can do what is needed." He looked pointedly toward the girl. "At least Michael is strong."

"They picked a sad-looking bunch to do homage," Menzies snorted. He sat down in the clearing and took off his boots. Jaqueline sat beside him, looking diffidently from Stephen to Michael Craig.

Smiling seraphically, Michael loped over to the girl. He squatted next to her on the ground. "You," he said, and grinned.

Stephen and Menzies got down to business.

"What were your instructions?" Menzies unstrapped his canteen and began to drink from it.

"To go to the plain. They said I'd know then what would be needed." Stephen winced as Menzies sloshed water around in his mouth and spat it on the ground. "What did they tell you?"

"Not much more" Menzies grinned. "Oh, yes. One thing. Nobody ever comes back. It may not be much help when we get there, but the girl is good with a gun." He looked at Stephen.

"What else did they tell you"?

"Later. We'd better start." Stephen walked to the edge of the clearing and called. "Come on, Michael."

"Wait." Jaqueline rose to her feet and walked toward Stephen. She glanced back at her brother almost apologetically. "Heneric, we'd better learn everything we can about this—homage—before we begin."

"Shut up, Jack." Menzies looked at her balefully.

"I think we'd better tell him about the verse."

"Shut up, Jack."

"I won't shut up. I'm going to tell him." She threw back her head and recited:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Till golden coin's blankest face
A forger finds at homage-place."

Stephen looked at her warily. "What's that supposed to mean?" Michael bumbled over to him and made the sign of the hammer in front of his face. Annoyed, Stephen brushed his hand away. "Never did that before."

The girl looked up. "Maybe it's a sign."

Stephen gently straightened Michael's arm, and the muscles forgot the sign as quickly as it had been made. "We have a verse, too," Stephen said. "The elders gave it to me when I left. I don't think it means anything:

"Since angel fell bad sky's alight . . .
Destroyer's hammer, angel-bright."

"Nothing. It all means nothing." Menzies kicked at his blanket roll. "Let's get going. Pick it up, Jack." Almost to himself, he mumbled. "Wonder why we go at all."

The girl gestured at the sky; it was stained red. "You know why."

"Everything. . . " Stephen swept his arm around him vaguely. "Everything would be destroyed—burned, I think—if we didn't go."

"You think that—thing out there knows who comes and who doesn't come?" Menzies shifted from foot to heavy foot, kicking at grasses with a booted toe. "I bet we could forget this whole thing right now, and nothing would come of it. Old wives' tales."

"Our people made a pact and we have to pay for it." Stephen started determinedly for the edge of the clearing. "It was promised four of us each year and four of us it will get." He looked at Menzies dangerously. "I wouldn't want to be responsible if it didn't get four."

"How do you know what's going to happen when we get there?"

Stephen set his teeth. "I don't."

"You," Michael said, stroking the girl's shoulder.

"Get out of here." Stephen scaled a stick at him. Hurt, Michael headed back into the brush.

"You shouldn't do that," the girl reproached him.

"My business, Miss Menzies."

"S'matter, Jack?" Menzies' voice was mincing and unpleasant. "Think you're protecting somebody important? Think you're protecting the destroyer?"

Stephen grinned embarrassedly. "He's right. Michael doesn't matter."

"The destroyer." The girl forced a laugh. "*That's* good." She laughed again.

Menzies pointed to the idiot and began to laugh.

Stephen's mood changed. "Don't laugh at him . . ." He walked toward Menzies, who sat

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

back, rubbing a heavy foot with one hand.

"Don't, Heneric. Don't laugh at his brother." The girl's voice was soft again and her anger was gone.

Menzies threw one boot at the brush sullenly, laughing when he heard Michael give a small yip of surprise. He heaved himself up and went looking for the boot.

The girl edged over to Stephen and whispered to him. "Do you suppose Heneric could be—important?"

Stephen drew back. "What do you mean?"

"That verse of yours. 'Since angel fell bad sky's alight . . .' See the red?" She gestured to the treetops, where the sky's ugly red stain had spread to touch the topmost branches." "Destroyer's hammer, angel-bright . . .' If Heneric is anything, he is a hammer."

"Don't be stupid. Those are just passwords."

"You think you know everything."

"More than any woman!"

They were glowering at each other when Menzies stepped back into the clearing. It was late, so they prepared and ate a meal in the clearing before starting out. When it was over, Menzies disappeared into the bushes again. Animosity forgotten, Stephen and the girl talked.

"What do you know about the homage?" she asked him.

"They never told us much."

"Mother always liked to tell us the people who did homage went somewhere better, afterward . . ." The girl's voice shook a little as she remembered. "Somewhere rich and cool. She used to talk about a green place, with wide pools of water and long, white halls where there was coolness and happiness . . ."

"So you'd want it and you'd go." Stephen leaned back, watching Menzies root in the bushes; he looked almost like Michael on one of his forays. "My father told me about it once when he was drunk; he said he thought you had to go to the mountain and pour water until the heat blistered you and you died, or the flame would grow and take over the whole country. He said you had to keep paying each year because of the Pact the elders made, he said you couldn't ever, ever stop." He lowered his eyes. "This thing we're going to is strong."

"You don't want to go any more than Heneric does, do you?"

Stephen drew himself up. "There are others in my family." He moved his eyes slowly over the thin, avid girl with the boxy haircut. He let a hint of scorn come into his voice. "There's a girl. I'd die twenty times before I let The Power harm her."

The girl looked at him interestedly. "You call it The Power?"

"Yes. Why?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"That's funny. Our people call it High One."

"Is there anything else?"

"Yes . . ." the girl hesitated. "Heneric doesn't know, but the old women gave me this." She dug into her pockets and dropped something small into Stephen's hand.

"What is it?"

"I—I'm not sure. The old women gave it to me at the end, when we left. They said it might mean something later."

Stephen held it up to the sun and looked at it carefully. It could have been a coin, but there was no design on its smooth metal surface. He handed it back to her and watched her hide it in the pocket of her khaki trousers.

"The verses . . ." she started to say.

"Come on, girl. Come on, Craig. It's high time we got started on this thing. As long as I'm running things, we aren't going to stand around palavering." Menzies stumped up to them, bootlaces flapping.

"Who put you in charge?" Stephen stood toe to toe with him.

"I did." Menzies put his thumbs in his belt and leaned toward Stephen until he stepped back.

Michael trotted out of the bushes and held his hand out to Menzies, who opened his palm to take what the idiot had found. He dropped a small, feathery carcass, just softened with decay, into it. "You," he said.

Menzies threw the creature at Michael's feet and walked to the edge of the field, rubbing his hand on his trousers. He motioned to his sister, who picked up her burden. "Come on," he growled, and shouldered his way into the bushes, heading toward the intense glow in the sky.

"Come on, Michael. Michael!"

The idiot gamboled in the field behind him, unheeding.

"Michael!" Turning on his brother, Stephen raised his arm, lowering it as he caught the fullness of one of Michael's bright smiles.

"You might as well carry the pack," he sighed. "Come here, Michael." He lashed his pack to the idiot's back, looping a twist of rope from Michael's belt to his own.

"Come on, Michael, m'boy. We might as well get on with it." Tugging at his brother like a man with a performing bear at the end of a leash, he started into the woods after the Menzies.

They slept that night in the shadow of the last of the trees, turning fitfully as the glow from the sky filtered through the leaves to their faces. Stephen had tied Michael to a large tree, leaving his rope loose because he knew his brother would sleep just as he had hit the ground, in a mammoth-doll sprawl, until he kicked him awake in the morning.

Stephen and the girl woke be-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fore Menzies. After disappearing into the bushes at opposite sides of the sleepers, they sat down with a heavy loaf of hard bread between them and talked. Michael would whimper when he found there was none for him at mid-morning, but neither Stephen nor the girl wanted to begin the noisy business of making a campfire.

"What were you doing before?" He looked at her.

"Keeping the home. Mother is dead, and that leaves me to do it. I suppose Father will have to teach one of my sisters to do it now. Heneric was a hunter."

"All the time?"

"Except when he slaughtered. Every third month they would call him down to the yards to slaughter. What did you do?"

"I was a student, until they chose me for this."

"A well-muscled student." She looked at him dispassionately.

"I hunted too." He gave her a proud look.

"And your brother?" The girl glanced at Michael, who lay face down, breathing into soft pine needles.

"What could he do?" Stephen shrugged his shoulder, exasperated. "He eats. He grows."

"But he has such a beautiful face." Jaqueline watched Michael's breath go in and out in pushes of his great shoulders.

"When did you first hear about the Homage?" Stephen tore the last piece of bread and gave her half.

"When I was old enough to walk," she said. "Menzies sing about the greatness of it from the time you're old enough to know what the words are, and before you get much older, you're singing it too."

"You make it sound glorious to be chosen." Stephen said. "They tell about how hard it is when we're still little. They guess about golden dragons and blistering flames. They say the clan has been doing homage every year since the first cottagers began, and as long as the Craigs keep doing it, the whole city will stand."

He looked over at Menzies, who grunted and bubbled in his sleep. Standing, he craned at the still-dark, silent trees. He stared once at the evil glow and crouched next to her, whispering.

"They say The Power fell on the land in a time of great hardship. Someone in the cottages, in the beginning, went to it and made a pact, and the cottagers prospered. They say the cities will go on and people and cattle and crops will thrive until the day when the Craigs and the Menzies stop sending four people each year. Then The Power will move and a great evil will come into the homes of the clans, and fire after that, and destruction after that. But they don't know what will come." Stephen dropped his head

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and sat down beside her, murmuring, "Till golden coin's blankest face . . . blank. Blank. Nobody knows what will come."

"They never told us about any ugly things." Jaqueline's voice was soft. "They just sang about the beauty after. Sometimes people talked about sending one Menzies and two Craigs, or two Menzies and no Craigs at all." She shook her head. "Some people, like Heneric, talk about going to the clearing and no farther. But every year two Menzies have met two Craigs and they have gone on together, to the end."

"How is that known?"

The girl smiled. "Didn't you suppose they'd send somebody to watch?"

Stephen whirled, staring at the heavy bushes.

"You won't see them. No one ever does. Father watched once, and that's how I found out. They watch until the two Craigs and the two Menzies get to the point where there's no way to turn back, and once the Craigs and the Menzies are on that road, they sit down to wait. When the day of homage is past, they turn around and go home and it's over for another year. The next year they follow again, and wait."

Stephen looked over at Menzies, who still slept. "I'm glad," he said. "Jaqueline," he moved closer to her. "Show me the coin again." Almost holding his breath, he watched her take it out of her deep pocket and turn it over in her hand.

"What do you think it is? What did your old women say it is?"

Her voice was so low he hardly caught her words. "I think it's a sign. I think it has something to do with the verses."

He drew back and let out his breath. "It couldn't have. Those verses have been in the clans since the beginning. They're just passwords, Jaqueline. That part about the destroyer's hammer, that comes from the Craigs, just tells what will happen if the clans refuse to pay. Everybody in the city says that. Don't be stupid, girl."

"And the part about the blank coin? 'Til golden-coin's blankest face . . .'"

"You Menzies have explained that. It's the homage act. It's just a symbol. Everybody in the cities says so."

"I don't know, Stephen." She put the coin back in her pocket, hurt. "I think it may help us. If it doesn't, and we get to the point where the watchers stop, I'm to leave it on a stone for them. They'll take it back to the village. Stephen, I think it means something."

"You're crazy."

She ducked her head and wiped her arm across her eyes.

"Oh, now, Jaqueline. I'm sorry . . ."

"Well . . ." She sniffled.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"When they start to wake up I'll get the wood and make the fire for you. All right? Jaqueline—I'm sorry." He wanted to make her feel better. "Jaqueline—"

"Yes?"

"Something I didn't tell you. Don't cry, Jaqueline. The elders told me—this may be the year."

"The year?"

"The year of the destroyer."

She smiled.

"But how this year?" Stephen murmured it so that the girl couldn't hear. "How?"

They talked about how they were chosen to do homage and how they felt when they learned they were to go. Head down, Stephen stammered out something he had never told anyone—that he thought that the debt to The Power must be far worse than any privation without the pact would have been. The girl looked at the glow in the sky and hushed him.

"I hope Michael is good for something," Stephen said, and tossed a rock onto Michael's pumping shoulders.

Shaking himself, the idiot got to his hands and knees. The rope held him. Uncomprehending, he pulled at the thing around his neck. Stephen got to his side and untied the knot before Michael choked himself.

Jaqueline shook Menzies who struck out at her, still half asleep, and stamped off into the bushes. He came back in time for breakfast with canteen water shimmering in his whiskers. He superintended the meal, snarling at the girl when she spilled a cup of coffee near his left foot.

"Take it easy, Menzies," Stephen said.

"Stick to your own idiot. Pack up, Jack. It's time we got under way."

Stephen helped the girl roll up Menzies' blankets. He packed his light gear and then dampened a rag to wipe Michael's face. Something made him want to rub and keep rubbing until that unchanging smile went away. He caught the girl looking at him and let the rag drop to the ground.

"Coming, Jack?" Menzies stood at the edge of the fringe of trees, impatient.

Stephen and Jaqueline moved to stand beside him at the precise, unalterable line where the trees stopped. Before them the ground was flat and gravelly and thick with ash. Michael danced in the brush behind them, humming a morning song. As they stood, he bounded past them, skirting Menzies warily, and stepped out of the shade of the trees.

"Come here, Michael." Stephen started after him, impatient to get him at the end of the leash he had prepared for the trip.

Menzies forged past, making heavy footprints in the ash. "Better tie that loony up or he'll never get

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to the homage place with us."

"He'll get there." Stephen finished the knot he was making at Michael's waist and gave him a little push. Michael pranced a step or two like a startled horse, tested the strength of the pull against his waist and looked at Stephen.

"You," he said. He smiled.

They walked for most of the day, and when night fell, they knew they were almost at the place of homage. The ground had begun to dip and swell in hills that made hard, monotonous climbing. Nothing living breathed on all the hilly plain. Air swirled and hung about them, cold and dead.

When they tried to sleep, there was almost nowhere to turn their eyes to shut out the sky's vermilion glow. At their backs, the land looked black, but the sky was brilliant.

Stephen turned and rolled on the hard ground. Once, when he opened his eyes, he saw the girl was sitting up, body turned tautly toward the brightest part of the glow. Grumbling, Menzies had buried his head under a pile of blankets. Michael slept as he had dropped, unmoving, face turned to the sky.

Menzies kicked Stephen awake. Stephen rolled away from him, cursing. He got to his feet and started to turn on Michael.

"Be gentle with him," the girl said. "We're almost there."

"Jack . . ." Menzies sighed, vexed.

"It's time to get up, Michael." Jaqueline shook the idiot gently, and sprinkled water from her canteen on his face. He laughed and shook his head delightedly.

"Cut that out, Jack. It's time to go." Menzies stood over her, lowering.

"It's time to go, Michael." She got to her feet hastily, and bent over Menzies' bed roll.

Not looking back at the others, Menzies began to tramp toward the red glow. He soon passed over the top of the hill, and they could hear him scuffing down the other side.

"Stephen!" The girl whispered his name.

"What?" Stephen dropped the leash he was tying around Michael's waist and went to her.

"I think we're almost there." Sighing, Jaqueline reached into her pocket. "I'd better leave this for the watchers." She put the coin on a flat rock, and working quietly, built a little cairn. "Perhaps next year . . ."

"What will that matter to us? We'll be dead. I told you it was all crazy—about this being the year. The Power won't be destroyed this year. The Power will never be destroyed. The wise men . . ." Stephen kicked at a stone and started up the hill. "I don't want to . . ." He hailed Menzies, who cursed at him.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Are you coming, Craig? Get moving, Jack. Where's the idiot?"

Remembering, Stephen looked back for Michael. Seated like a child in front of a pile of blocks, legs spraddled, the idiot played with the stones of the cairn. He grinned, and waved something bright—the coin.

"Michael, Michael!" Swearing under his breath, Stephen raced down the hill to the cairn. He slapped Michael's wrist, trying to make him relinquish the coin.

"Let him have it!" the girl said sharply.

Stephen looked at her, surprised.

"It's all right, Stephen. There must be other coins for other years."

Michael held the coin out to her. "You," he said.

Furious, Stephen fixed the leash around his waist and tied himself to his brother. He and Michael and the girl had to run to catch up with Menzies, who toiled over the next hill.

They walked for most of the day, moving toward the overpowering glow with eyes turned down, away from it. The sun had begun to set in some other direction when they knew they were almost there. Michael tugged at his leash until Stephen let him go free; then he ran ahead, disappearing over a sharp rise in the ground. He came racing back, knees lifted, feet flung wide.

"You," he panted, and then his smile grew bright again as he forgot what was on the other side.

Stephen and Menzies and the girl pushed to the top of the ridge and stood, somehow disappointed. At first there seemed to be no great presence there.

"This is where we pay homage," Menzies growled. "Look."

Four metal stakes stood a few yards ahead of them, planted at the sharp brink of a chasm. Beyond the chasm a final hill rose, round, metallic, red at the crater like some living volcano. The sides of the final hill pulsated, as though something restless moved within.

"High One . . . lives there . . ." the girl said, awed.

Stephen knotted his fingers in his hair. "It's monstrous."

"I knew we should have skirted it—gone to the other side and on to some other country while we still had the chance." Menzies pushed past him and threw himself down on the top of the ridge. "Homage. That's what the Menzies always said, and that's what I thought. Homage, huh! Human sacrifice!"

"Heneric." The girl paled at his words and then looked toward the stakes again. They were what they looked like—death markers. White bones lay haphazardly crumbled at each stake's base. Shreds of rope hung from them, motionless in the stillness. Despite

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the hot redness at the hilltop, the air was damp and cold.

"How could The Power make the people pay? How could it, once people got here?" Stephen dropped next to Menzies, turning his back on the hill, the chasm and the stakes. "We could leave now, and there would be nothing to stop us."

"Because there are no guards?" Jaqueline looked at him sadly. "You forget the watchers. I think they waited, back where I built the cairn."

"What this thing wants," Menzies said, getting up heavily, "is death. That's all."

The girl shook her head, almost whispering. "I don't think so."

Menzies ignored her. He turned to look at the stakes, rubbing at his whiskers and his heavy mouth. "It wants death—but we don't know how *many* deaths it wants. Four came each year, but did four die?"

Stephen stiffened. "It would be too bad," he said slowly, "if all of us had to go."

"We could see what one death would do." Menzies smiled, musing. "And if one death wouldn't do we could—" he grinned—"all go down to do homage."

"It would be too bad," Stephen said, "if we all had to go."

"Perhaps one—one offering would be all that is needed." The girl smoothed a hand over her dull hair.

"I think I know who will do for High One." Menzies got to his feet. "Destroyer!" he laughed.

Michael smiled and came toward them, holding a pebble.

"Perhaps he can do what is needed." Stephen walked toward his brother. "Perhaps this is what he was always meant for."

"He may be the one to do homage," the girl said dreamily. "He has such a beautiful face."

Stephen moved closer to the idiot, who fixed his eyes on his brother and smiled unendingly.

"Stop smiling, damn you!" Stephen grimaced and turned away.

"I'll take care of him." Menzies was beside him.

"Go, Michael." Stephen bowed his head and walked away.

Michael let Menzies take him by the rope that still hung around his waist. He laughed out loud when Menzies went through his roll and came up with more lengths of rope. He smiled and said "You" when Menzies led him down the hill and to the stakes. He stood obediently when Menzies ordered him to one of the stakes, rubbing his back against its rough surface.

When Menzies cursed him and pushed his arms so he could get the rope around them, Michael broke the first strands and, grunting, threw Menzies into the gorge.

By the time he had galloped up the hill to Stephen and Jaqueline, he had forgotten what he had done.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The sky was so bright with the glow of the last hill that they hardly realized it was getting dark until they stepped into the shadow of the ridge. They sat for a while, silent. Finally, Stephen rummaged through Menzies' pack for the last of the supplies and they ate.

Michael sat, strangely still. He didn't smile. The girl said nothing. Stephen finally turned to her.

She looked at him unwaveringly. "That kind of death won't be enough," she said.

He bit his knuckles. "If this had only been the year . . ." He got to his feet and looked over the top of the ridge at the last hill. It throbbed and shifted under his eyes.

Stephen took his brother's hand and sighed. "Come, Michael."

Talking gently, Stephen and the girl took Michael to the stakes at the edge of the chasm. Michael smiling trustingly at Stephen and the girl.

"He'd jump in if I told him to."

Neither the girl nor Stephen looked to see how far Menzies had fallen. They bound Michael loosely to a stake, giving him the last of their bread to keep him busy while he waited.

Slowly, moving through the ash like waders in a strong tide, Stephen and Jaqueline left Michael and went toward the ridge. They didn't look back; they didn't want to see him strain toward them, then settle back against the stake, already beginning to forget they were there.

"If this doesn't work," the two promised each other, "we will go and fasten ourselves at the stakes. It may take all three of us to make up for the loss of Heneric."

"It will be enough. Michael can do what is needed." Stephen reassured himself.

Believing any small gesture, any detail, might mean survival, they stood watch at opposite ends of the ridge, hidden from each other by heavy ash, warm and somehow welcome against the damp chill of the air. He raised his head.

"I believe it happens at first moonglow."

"I hope so," the girl said.

Beneath them, at the stake, Michael stood, knees locked, gazing into the chasm, not looking at the glowing hill. When he couldn't watch any more, Stephen burrowed a space in the soft ash and put his jacket there.

At first, he thought he might sleep. Each time he closed his eyes a cold, bad feeling hit him at the back of the throat and he saw Michael's bright smile. When he opened his eyes and looked out toward the flowing hill, he saw Michael had raised his head. Silhouetted in the light, he gazed at the hill. Stephen saw a crack begin at the top of the crater, but he couldn't watch it for remembering the times Michael had come to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

him, with a twig, a stone, a dead thing, saying "You."

He began to remember the times when he and Michael had played together, before they had seemed so different from each other, and he found himself edging forward on his belly, creeping toward his brother at the stake.

He was halfway there when he looked up and saw that the girl, flattened against the gravel and ash, was moving too. They met sheepishly.

"He's my brother," Stephen said. "I'll have to try. He doesn't know enough. He shouldn't have to be the one."

"He's gentle," the girl murmured. "I'm not much—I kept house. Let me try first."

They moved toward Michael, almost unaware of the great crack that had zigzagged halfway down the hill, or of the bright glare that spilled out of it. They fumbled with the loose ropes at Michael's waist and tugged at him.

"Hurry, Michael."

Forgetting him, Stephen and the girl moved to stand erect at the stakes. Michael went to a spot behind them, not far from the stakes, and began to pad softly back and forth.

Hardly thinking, not hearing, Stephen spoke.

"Since angel fell bad sky's alight . . ."

The girl stirred. "Till golden coin's blankest face . . ."

"Destroyer's hammer, angel bright . . ."

*"A forger finds at homage-place."*

They turned bright, unseeing eyes upward, past the hill of the High One, to the sky, waiting.

The moon rose.

Inside the hill, The Power, High One, surged and coiled. The creature sprang through the crack and across the chasm in a brilliance and splendor that was the last thing the two in homage ever saw. The young devil that had gripped the land for so long seethed about them; the lesser fallen angel curled about their minds and devoured them, not sensing the dumb being which moved back and forth, back and forth in the creature's brightness, absorbing it, changing, even as the prophesies had said it would. The Power flashed and turned around the four stakes, looking for the rest, dissatisfied because it found only half of what was promised. High One halted and then hurtled toward the being it had just discovered, the other Craig. It drove for the mind and found there was nothing it could attach. In its glow, the idiot strengthened and changed.

Michael took a step forward and spoke. "You . . . perish."

It drew back. Sheathed in radiance, Michael uprooted a stake and marched forward to destroy the power. His face was beautiful.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

*In one sense, this story has no place in F & SF; in another sense, it has every right to be included—it is a handy home guide to a balanced point of view in regard to matters of concern to most of us here present.*

# DOCTOR ROYKER'S EXPERIMENT

*by Joseph Whitehill*

My name is Charles Gridley. I am a salesman of reagents and laboratory supplies. Or I was until noon today. Since then I have been considering other avenues; perhaps I shall sell furs or securities henceforth. There are, after all, other fields besides reagents and laboratory supplies which employ the dignified, low-pressure sell. I am at the moment rather upset, so if I should fail to explain everything quite clearly and in proper order, you must bear with me.

It began last night at the monthly dinner of the Scientific Society. (Because I am only a salesman, and not a professional person like the Participating Members, I am called an Associate Member. The Society established this classification last year for men in the peripheral fields of science, like salesmen and manufacturers of equipment.) I shared a table last night with Darcy, the thin young petroleum chemist who has been doing such fine things with asphalt, Schwenk, whose name is on a spectrograph we distribute, and little, brusque Doctor Royker. Doctor Royker, the senior physicist at the University, is the most famous of all the Society's membership. You have doubtless heard of his eminent work in Time-and-Information circuitry. (I must be candid here and admit that I do not know what Time-and-Information circuitry is; but I have sold him some equipment for it, and that is where his fame lies.) Should you not know of his work, surely you know his face from the publishers' advertisements of his many books; his heavy spectacles and his short gray beard with the moles showing through are virtual trademarks.

While we four ate, Schwenk



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and Darcy did most of the talking, and in a vein which filled me with increasing indignation. They were complaining in chorus of the sciences as professions. Their talk was replete with phrases like "inadequate incentive" and "executive overcontrol" and "government interference" and "measly salaries"—the words of selfish and short-sighted men. Schwenk said at one point, "No wonder we're short of engineers and research men. Dogs and horses are smarter than we are. What dog ever invented a muzzle? What horse ever researched hobbles? You take Gridley here—" He pointed at me with his chicken-leg. "Gridley is the best-off of the four of us. Salesmen aren't stabled and regulated."

My patience was exhausted, and in such a state I am inclined to speak rather too much and too hastily. (My impatience may well be the reason I performed so poorly in the laboratory that one year of graduate school, and was forced to turn to selling.) I said, "Just let Gridley the salesman get a word in here now, if you please."

My tone must have been severe, for they stopped talking and looked at me. Even Doctor Royker, who had been concentrating on his food and whispering equations to himself, stopped whispering and looked up.

"Gentlemen," I said, "when I come to these meetings I rarely say anything. I come to listen and concentrate and try to understand what I hear from all these finer minds than my own. But when I hear talk like yours I cannot stay silent. Gentlemen," I said, "if you were children you would deserve to be properly spanked. How can you—how *can* you say you are poorly rewarded in your jobs when every man and woman in the United States looks up to you and admires your kind? How can you grouse like little boys when you both are part of the most magnificent movement this world has ever seen?" (I was, perhaps, excited.) "*You* are the real leaders of civilization. *Your* brains and dedication and unselfishness are what have made this country great! And in another ten or twenty years the advances here will have been peacefully spread over the entire globe, and the *world* will be great!"

None of the others said anything. Doctor Royker took another mouthful and grunted, so I included him too and spoke to all three. "Without this country's scientists the entire world would still be a poor and shabby place. No matter how small your individual part may appear, you must never forget that. Now, pardon me for intruding. I am only a salesman. I failed as a scientist," I said, "but if I had had the talent that you fellows have, I would be doing exactly what you are today, and proud of the opportunity."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Schwenk and Darcy were silent; I could see I had given them something to think about. But Doctor Royker swallowed and cleared his throat and said to me, "You think science is good?"

"Yes, I do," I said. I was afraid I had given him offense with my intemperate speech.

"All science?"

"Yes, all science."

"Hmph," Doctor Royker said.

He piled peas-and-carrots onto a slice of chicken breast on his fork, hoisted it into his mouth, and set off on another long chew, so I said, "Science is good almost by social definition. Look what science has done for humanity."

Doctor Royker stared at me through those bull's-eye spectacles of his while he chewed. I was prepared for him to adduce the net loss humanity showed briefly at Hiroshima, but after he swallowed he said, "Could your mind be changed?"

"I don't think so," I said. "There are some things you just *know* are true."

He mopped a biscuit about in his gravy. "Truth is conditional on repeated proof."

"That's so," I said. I hesitated to press him to anger. "But look at all the benefits to mankind. Aren't they your repeated proofs?"

"History hasn't been going long enough to tell. We can't take a long enough view." He put the biscuit in his mouth and chewed with his eyes shut. I thought he was done with me. Then he opened them suddenly and said, "Suppose I were to set up a process experiment down in the lab at school—an experiment that might change your mind. Would you come?"

"Certainly," I said, somewhat faint with the honor. "But would I be able to understand it?"

"Sure. But you must say now that your mind could possibly be changed."

"All right. I have to say it." I did, you see.

"Very well. Be at Baker Laboratory at noon sharp."

"But what will it be about?" I asked.

"Yes," Darcy said. "How can you process semantics in the lab?"

Schwenk laughed: "No semantics. He's got a death ray that works only on bureaucrats and department heads."

Doctor Royker did not smile. To me he said, "You must wait." And to the others he said, "This is not for you. This is just between—what's your name again?—between Gridley and me."

And he would say no more about it. I contained my curiosity and did not press him, for, frankly, I did not wish to imperil this honor granted me, a casual acquaintance, by so busy and famous a man as Doctor Royker.

After the papers had been read and the business of the meeting

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was over, I was getting into my topcoat in the lobby when Doctor Royker hurried by. I called to him, "Noon tomorrow!"

He turned and saw me and nodded shortly, then swung into the revolving door.

That was last night. This morning I did not sell well, for I was half-preoccupied with my memories of last night's dinner, and with speculations about the sort of experiment Doctor Royker might prepare. Was I to see some horrendously anti-social development of his science? Or, worse, would he simply have forgotten all about me?

I need not have worried. Doctor Royker, in his tan laboratory smock, met me just inside the crowded door of Baker Laboratory at exactly noon. Classes were just over. He nodded to me and said, "Follow me, Mister Gridley. We'll have to hurry a bit." Students and teachers streamed noisily past us, all departing the building for lunch. Following Doctor Royker as best I might, I noticed he carried a stopwatch in his hand.

His smock rustling, he trotted with that famous short-legged stride of his down the long, bare hall, and as we rounded a corner he said over his shoulder with some impatience, "Come along, now, or we shall be late" The smell of freshman hydrogen sulphide was in the air.

We descended two flights of stairs to the sub-basement, where the bare little private laboratories were. I followed him past many doors, almost to the end of the empty corridor, until he stopped by a blank, unmarked wooden door and paused listening, with his hand poised tensely over the knob. Then he made an angry hissing sound and shook his head. "We're late," he whispered in irritation. "It's already begun. We can't go in yet." I heard the stopwatch click in his hand. He stood facing the blank door listening, his hands in the pockets of his smock, staring up at the lintel of the door.

I listened too, of course—listened with all my attention. For the first few minutes I could hear nothing specific or definable from behind the door. Down the far stairwell came occasional distant sounds of doors slamming, and the faint shouts of student conversations. One of the great pipes over my head gurgled occasionally as a toilet was flushed somewhere in the building. And, when my ears grew used to the silence, and my own body-noises from the fast walk had diminished, I became aware of the hum of the fluorescent ceiling light far down the corridor.

I stood behind Doctor Royker in the same posture as he; feet apart, hands in pockets, head back, listening. Then, over the sound of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

my own heart in my ears, I began to hear something. So soft and so far-spaced were the sounds that I had difficulty at first in discovering that the interval between them was *regular*. The closest I can approach a description of the sounds themselves (all of which were unvaryingly alike), is to say that each sounded somewhat like that made by a person quietly whispering the letter "p." (Not "pee"; only the labial stop, as the letter would be used in a word. You must try this to understand it.)

As silently as I could, I took my hand from my pocket in order to see the face of my wristwatch. As silent as I was, however, Doctor Royker's head half-turned in irritation. While I timed the interval between these pulses, I marveled at the acuity of his hearing. After a few minutes, I determined that the interval of the sounds I heard was eleven seconds, almost too long a time for a musically untrained person to recognize period-identity.

As we stood there, the faint sounds from the building above had diminished until now the humming of the fluorescent light and the rustling of our clothing as we breathed, and the eleven-second pulses from behind the blank door were all we heard.

The Doctor did not move. He stood frozen in his listening attitude, as though he had by an effort of will dehumanized himself and exorcised his normal need to stir and scratch.

As the long empty minutes passed, I began to wish badly for a cigaret. But Doctor Royker, himself a heavy smoker, had not yet lighted his pipe, so I elected to imitate his self-denial. The period was a tense one for me, for I expected momentarily to see him relax and stop his watch and turn to me. And of course I speculated with much fruitless confusion about the nature of this private process which was happening beyond the door.

And, frankly, I began to wonder how much longer this was going to take.

When I shifted my feet on the concrete floor to ease the stiffness in my arches, Doctor Royker's head turned slightly. Then, embarrassingly, my stomach commenced to grumble aloud. (I had not taken lunch before coming, and wished now I had.)

The upshot was that, after listening in shame to my visceral sounds for some minutes more, and growing all the while increasingly uncomfortable—thirsty, stiff, hungry, and wanting a cigaret—I whispered to the Doctor, "Excuse me, sir, but can you tell me about how much longer this will—"

He snapped his stopwatch and turned to me. "It is over now," he said abruptly. His expression seemed to me a queer compound of merriment and rage; his beard

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wagged and his blue eyes flashed behind his dense spectacles. He looked at his stopwatch, then put it in his pocket saying, "Twenty-seven minutes, eighteen seconds!" He folded his arms and peered up at me, moistening his lips by thrusting each out in turn. "Science worship! *Bah!*" he screeched. Then he ducked like a rabbit through a nearby door and slammed it decisively.

When I had somewhat recovered from the numbness of my shock, I lighted a cigaret and looked about the corridor. I counted eighteen doors in all; sixteen were numbered and were fitted with brass Yale locks. One said "Men" on it. The remaining one, the blank one, faced me. Surrendering heedlessly to my mounting rage, I wrenched this door wide. Inside was a tiny janitor's closet! At its back wall was a sink with a dirty mop in it, and, as I watched, a drop of water loosed itself from the faucet and fell, making the sound of a whispered labial stop.

---

***Through Time And Space With Ferdinand Feghoot: XXXI***

Dr. Gropius Volkswagen, the philologist, was the one man who disliked Ferdinand Feghoot's ravishing cousin, Isabeau Feghoot. "Isa*beau* indeed!" he would grumble. "What does it matter if her mother was time-travelling, and so she was born long ago when Henry VIII or Harry the Trueman ruled Missouri and England? She should be Isa*belle*. Isabeau is archaic!"

Isabeau paid no attention. When Ferdinand warned her that the old man was dangerously brooding, she just giggled.

Then one evening they found Dr. Volkswagen lying in wait for them with a blunderbuss. "Ha-Ha!" he cried wildly. "Now I show you! To use obsolete names is a very bad habit. Take paper, a pencil! You must write, first *archaic* one thousand times—then, one thousand times, *It is a bad habit.* Write!"

They wrote, wrote, and wrote. When they had finished, with Isabeau nearly in tears, he ordered them to wad up the papers. "Now I, Gropius Volkswagen, will make you eat up your words. Begin!"

He waited until they had finished. "Well," he crowed, "will that teach you not to use Isa*beau*? Does it not prove you wrong?"

"Not at all," replied Ferdinand Feghoot. "It just shows that we're a remarkable family. We can eat archaic and habit too."

—GRENDEL BRIARTON (*with thanks to M. T. Cicero McIntyre*)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

## *In this issue . . .*

When this issue had been assembled, it became apparent that a theme ran through it—most of the stories seem to be saying that it is astonishingly easy for man to fail to realize what is happening to him and to the world around him, and that such a loss of the large view can be exceedingly perilous. This sort of unintentional putting together of a theme issue has happened before, and we are not at all sure what the significance may be. Possibly, it is pure coincidence that a disparate group of writers should produce, more or less simultaneously, stories having to do with the same general subject; possibly the writers and/or the editor are influenced commonly by the climate of the times . . . Whatever the reasons—do you like the effect, or would you prefer deliberate avoidance of issues built around a single theme?

The Good Doctor Asimov wishes to add a footnote to one of his recent columns: "In my article 'Beyond Pluto' (July, 1960) I mentioned the report of a Soviet discovery of a tenth planet and added that it might turn out to have been all a mistake. For once, my intuition seems to have been correct. According to Willy Ley (a good friend of mine who occasionally writes on scientific subjects) the Soviets had merely discovered another planetoid. Strictly speaking, that is a new planet. The translator, however, turned it into a 'tenth' planet, implying a Trans-Plutonian one."

## *Coming next month . . .*

For the third year, the October issue will be a special All-Star Issue —all new stories by top writers in this and other fields. The line-up is not definite, but will be drawn largely from the following: "Shotgun Cure," by Clifford D. Simak . . . "The Oath," by James Blish . . . "Something," by Allen Drury . . . "From Shadowed Places," by Richard Matheson . . . "The Sight of Eden," by Howard Fast . . . "Time Lag," by Poul Anderson . . . "A Few Miles," by Philip Jose Farmer . . . "Interbalance," by Katherine MacLean . . . "How Lucky We Met," by Wade Miller . . . "Inside the Comet," by Arthur C. Clarke . . . and others.

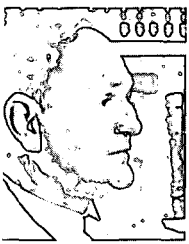


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

**CLIFTON FADIMAN,** writer and editor, judge of the Book-of-the-Month Club, writes: *"Each of us has his own special escape-reading. Mine is science fiction. To my mind Fantasy and Science Fiction regularly supplies the finest the field has to offer in the way of short fiction."*

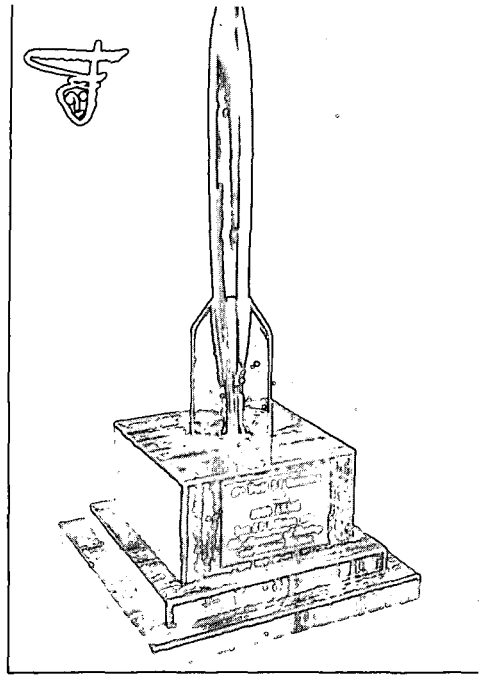
**SPRING BYINGTON,** famous star of the Broadway stage and motion pictures, now starring in the CBS TV show "December Bride," writes: *"If your imagination is sedentary, getting stiff, inelastic, arthritic, it needs exercise. For this I prescribe one issue a month of Fantasy and Science Fiction. Improvement will be noted after the first dose."*



**BASIL DAVENPORT,** writer and editor, judge of the Book-of-the-Month Club, writes: *"I have been a fan of science fiction all my life, and of The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction for all its life. F&SF gives us some of the best writing in the field, and the field is one of great importance."*

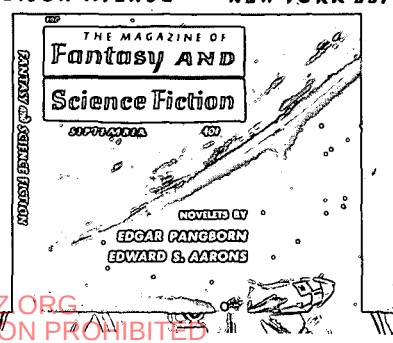
**HUGO GERNSBACK,** pioneer in science fiction publishing, writer and editor, writes: *"Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose—is a French truism, lamentably accurate of much of our latter day science fiction. Not so in the cyclotronic Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction which injects sophisticated isotopes, pregnant with imagination, into many of its best narratives."*

**ORVILLE PRESCOTT,** literary critic and author, Book Review Editor for the *New York Times, writes: "People who think that their literary I.Q. is too high for them to enjoy the Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction don't know what they are missing. The number of well-written, ingenious and entertaining stories it regularly publishes is astonishingly high."*



*Two years in a row, now,* The Magazine of FANTASY *and* SCIENCE FICTION *has been awarded the Hugo as the world's best science fiction magazine. The award is made by the annual World Science Fiction Convention, on the basis of voting by the entire membership, and it is a signal honor in the field.*

**527 MADISON AVENUE NEW YORK 22.**




**"...The Magazine of FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION consistently publishes more stories of high quality than any other science fiction magazine in the world."**
*William Gorman* NEW YORK TIMES Book Review

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG.
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED